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FANTASY SCI-FI HORROR

GURPS Goblins
Goblins in Georgian London?
Are they mad?

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the roleplaying magazine

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New ideas for the grim world of steam-power and oppression

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& Roleplaying

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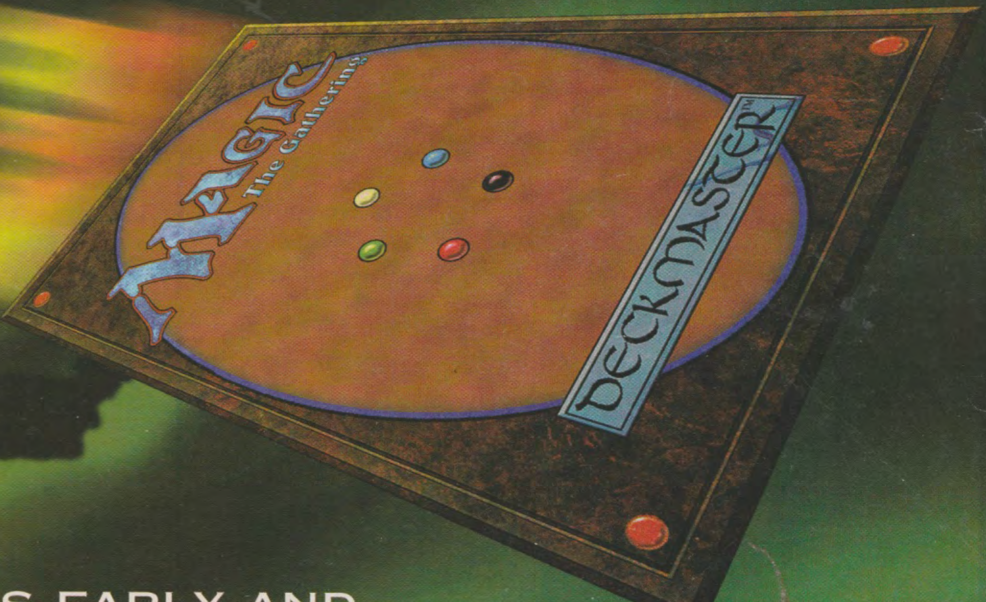

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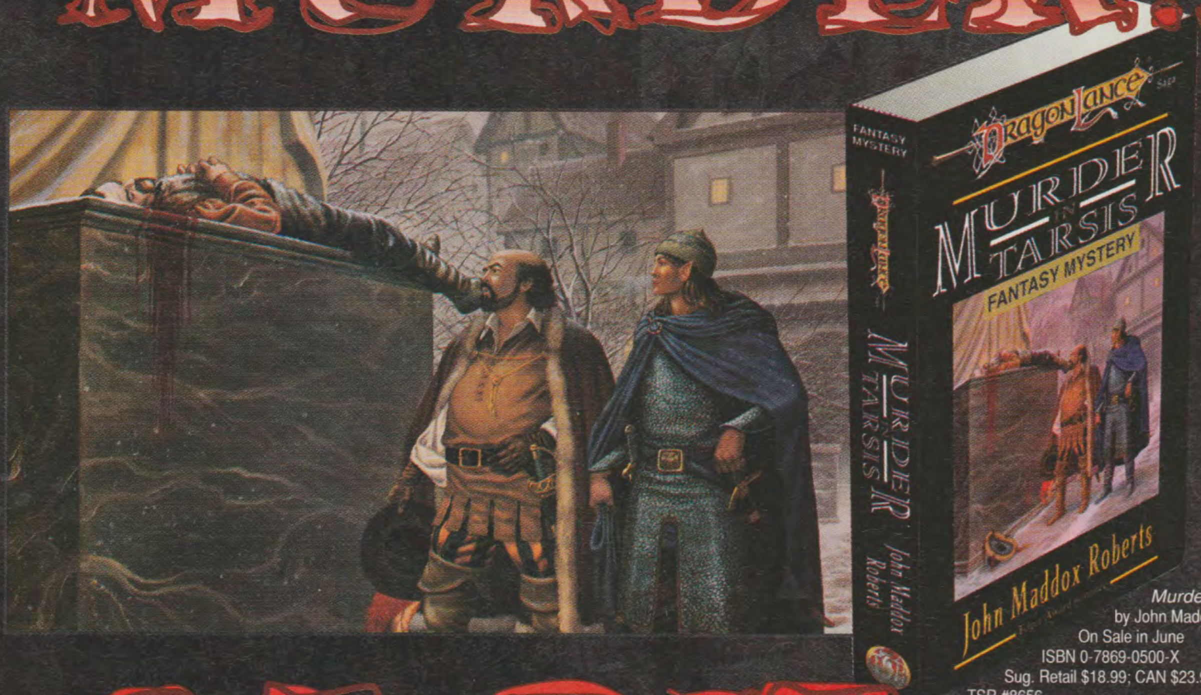
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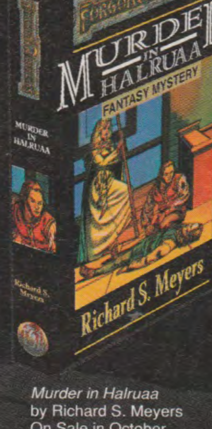
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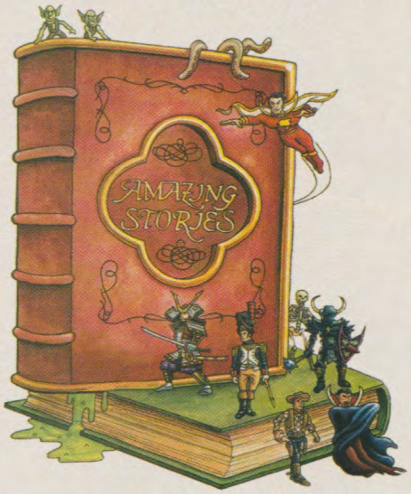

Create the game you want to play with our guide to creating your very own RPG.

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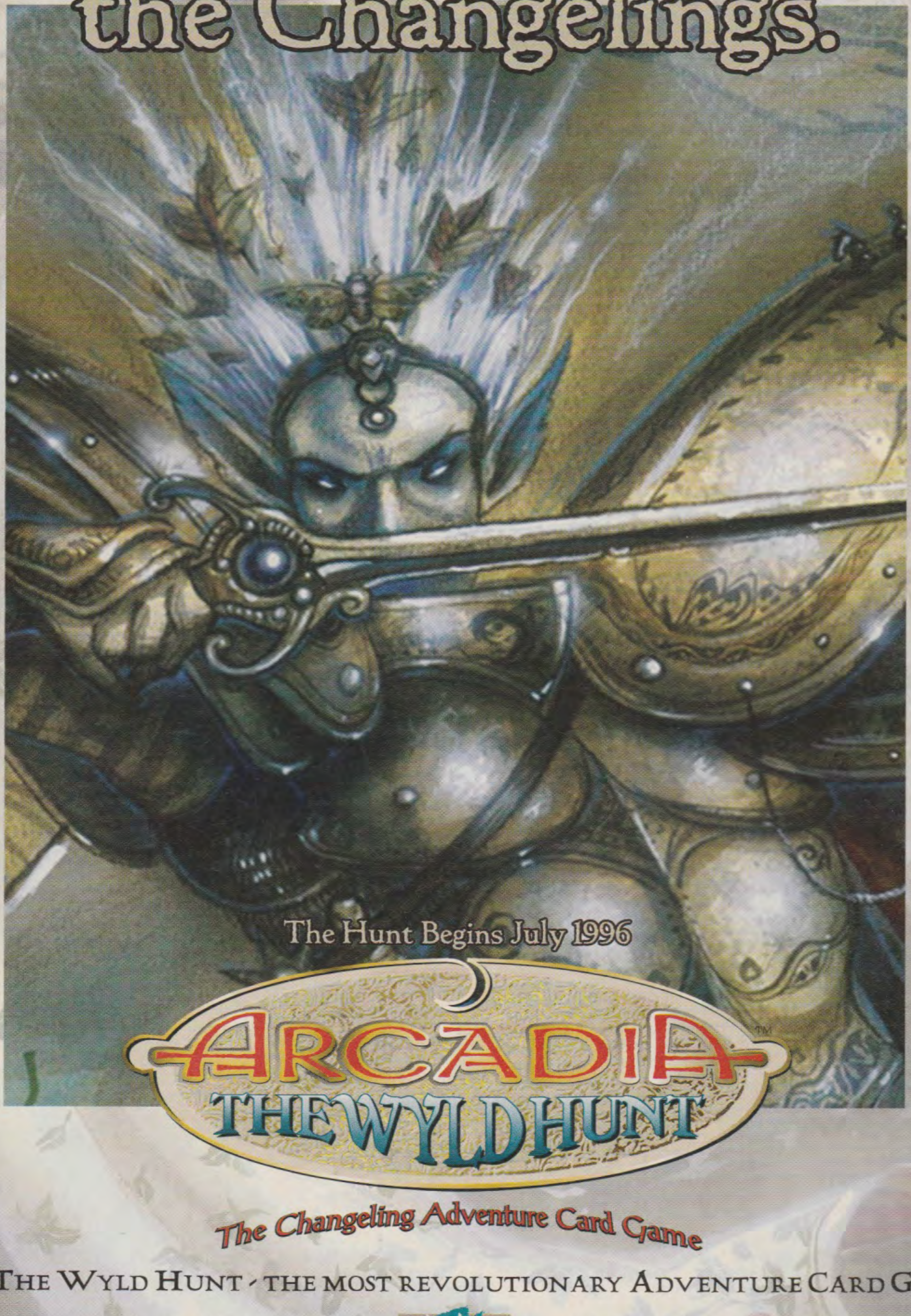
An Epic Journey Through the Mystical Homeland of the Changelings.



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This issue would have been
impossible without...
the Easter break
This issue would have been a lot
easier without... **Roadworks**

UP FRONT

Xenophobia. It's an ugly thing. Not that that's relevant to anything (although it's true). It's just that I wanted to use the superb X above before I left.

Yes. Left. I'm making way for somebody else. I'm biting the bullet. I'm saddling my horse and heading off into the sunset. I am, in short, giving up the editor's job at **arcane.**

Now I know what you're all thinking, because I've read all the letters that have said: "you won't make it past issue 4" and "no British roleplaying magazine has ever succeeded" and "you're great but you won't be around in a year" and now you're thinking: "aha, the editor's going – that's the first sign of a magazine in trouble." Well, I've only got one reply to that. Nonsense.

In its first six months, **arcane** has established itself as a successful magazine. Successful because (if you'll allow me a little immodesty here) it's pretty bloody good. Successful because you seem to like it enough to buy it regularly. Successful because the games companies have been waiting a long time for an independent forum to feature their games. Successful because it sells a lot of advertising to those games companies. Successful because it'll soon be selling as many copies each month in America as it already does in Europe. Successful because it's published by a major publishing group with over forty different magazines that Knows What It Is Doing.

So if it's all the same to you, we'd rather not hear from any doubters out there – okay?

Now I may not be the editor any longer but I will be maintaining my involvement with **arcane.** From next issue you'll see my name in the panel opposite under the new title of 'consultant editor', and in fact you'll probably notice me more in the magazine because, freed from the administrative duties of editor, I hope to be writing a lot more.

That's if Paul gives me any work to do. Paul Pettengale that is, the new editor. The clever among you will already know Paul – he's written lots for us in the past, including our review of *Don't Look Back* last issue, and has been an honorary member of the team for some time. This issue he's responsible for the feature on handling character death that starts on page 28. Paul was, in a previous incarnation, the Deputy Editor of *PC Guide* magazine and has been a professional journalist for some years. He is also an avid roleplayer, prizing *Call of Cthulhu* above all other games, and is a keen, and rather good, *Magic* player. So you're in safe hands.

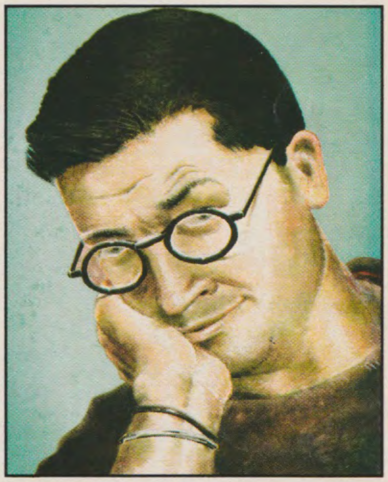


Illustration Simon Gurr

So all that remains for me to do is wish you all well and hope that you enjoy the last magazine under my stewardship. I personally think it's a bit of a cracker (I love the cover especially), jam-packed with ideas, opinions and reviews to help you get the most out of your gaming. I think the 'Dicing with the Devil' article on religion and roleplaying is particularly worth your time (it starts on page 22), as is the great collection of ideas for anybody who wants to start a Steampunk campaign that begins on page 34.

I've really enjoyed being the launch editor of **arcane,** and if you think I've done a good job (or even if you don't and you want to have an argument about it), look out for me at a convention and buy me a beer. I like beer.

Steve Faragher
Editor

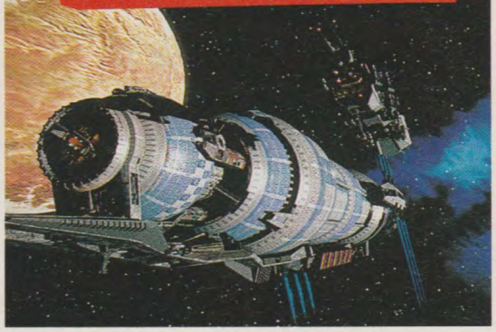
Last month we mistakenly credited the cover illustration to Tim Bolton. It was of course by John Bolton. Doh. Sorry John.

Any messages for Paul Pettengale should be sent to the usual **arcane** address, or he can be e-mailed as pettengale@futurenet.co.uk

DESPATCHES

The Babylon Project

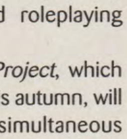
COMING SOON



Above: the *Babylon 5* space station – the setting for the TV show which has inspired the game.

Left: The show's cast assemble for a group photo – how thoughtful of them.

Below left: The game will feature many alien races for players to, er, play.



A *Babylon 5* RPG to be with us by autumn

CHAMELEON ECLECTIC, together with Warner Brothers, WireFrame Productions and Babylonian Productions, recently announced the forthcoming release of *The Babylon Project*, a roleplaying game based on J Michael Straczynski's highly acclaimed, long runnin g, science fiction series *Babylon 5*.

The television show, which returns to Channel 4 this month, has an audience of around six million viewers, so it's clearly a highly lucrative franchise for Chameleon. But what really makes *Babylon 5* interesting from the roleplayer's point of view is the detail of its universe and its intricate, continuing storyline. Indeed, its depth is such that many fans describe it as television's equivalent to *Lord of the Rings*.

> "*Babylon 5* has amazing gaming potential."

The roleplaying game will centre on a time period shortly before that featured in the show, with players taking the roles of humans or aliens in the troubled period following the Earth-Minbari war.

"This is a really exciting project for us," said Chameleon Eclectic president Charles Ryan. "With a cohesive, detailed, and intricate background, the *Babylon 5* universe has incredible gaming potential, and the show has an enormous following. It's probably the most eagerly-anticipated licensed roleplaying game ever." Quite.

The *Babylon Project*, which is due for release this autumn, will appear with the simultaneous release of *The Earthforce Sourcebook*. This will be the first in a series of sourcebooks and supplements that is already set to include *The Earth Colonies Sourcebook* and the *Game Resource Kit*. Sounds good to us, let's hope that the game and the subsequent source material lives up to the quality of the show (Maryanne, the art editor, is a stalwart fan, so she says).

For more information, check out Chameleon Eclectic's Web site at:

`http://skynet.bevc.blacksburg.va.us/cee/`

GURPS Discworld

Terry Pratchett's novels get the *GURPS* treatment

THERE ARE FEW OF us who can claim to have not read a *Discworld* novel at some time – you know, the series of 18 books written by humourous fantasy virtuoso Terry Pratchett that line the shelves in Waterstones with a similar ubiquity to baked beans in Tescos – and everyone of us has got to agree that they're pretty damn funny.

Now, more than ten years after the first book – *The Light Fantastic* – was released, it's been announced that we can expect a roleplaying game to appear based on the series. *GURPS Discworld*, from the prolific offices of Steve Jackson Games, will be a supplement for the *GURPS* RPG system. It will be penned by none other than Terry Pratchett himself (with a little help from John M Ford, the winner of a host of science fiction and fantasy awards, and the man responsible for the humourous *Star Trek* novel *How Much for Just the Planet?*).

COMING SOON
THE DISCWORLD MAPP
Being the Onlie True & Mostlie Accurate Mappe of the Fantastyk & Magical Dyscworlde
Devised by
TERRY PRATCHETT
& STEPHEN BRIGGS
'De Chelonian Mobile'

The *Discworld* map should prove invaluable when the game appears – check out your bookstores now!

There's a somewhat vague release date of 'early 1997', so it'll be some time before we can haul Luggage around and shout Death down, but when *GURPS Discworld* does arrive you can be sure that the tongue-in-cheek atmosphere of the books will be more than obvious in the game. Terry Pratchett, when questioned about the project, mentioned: "The *Discworld* background is perfect for the GM with a sense of the absurd. In fact, it ought to be completely impossible to play a 'straight' roleplaying adventure in this world." Should be fun…

Mythos

The Lovecraft-inspired CCG crawls into existence

YOUR DAYS ARE numbered. The Great Old Ones are looming ever nearer, preparing to ensnare you and your kin, to take over your bodies and minds, and to turn you to their will. Or, at least, that's what the game world of *Call of Cthulhu* would have you believe, a world which is soon to grow with the release of the *Mythos* CCG.

arcane reported the imminence of this Lovecraft-inspired card game back in issue 1, though at the time details were more than a little sketchy. Since then, however, we've managed to discover a great deal more about the game and the way it works (thanks primarily to Chaosium's Web site, which you can peruse yourself at `http://www.sirius.com/~chaosium/chaosium.html`).

Players assume the roles of Investigators who, at the start of play, are leading perfectly ordinary lives, unaware that the world is out to get them. Each player uses a deck of 52 cards (the Starter Decks come with 60 cards, eight of which you discard, thus giving you an element of deck building with just one Starter) in an attempt to complete an Adventure without going insane. To win you must accrue the number of points indicated on your Adventure card before the other player does so.

As you proceed, visiting various locations and meeting a host of denizens from Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos, you gradually lose sanity points (much as characters do in the *Call of Cthulhu* RPG). If at any stage you lose all of these points, you're unable to complete your quest and the game ends. Each player can use monsters that they encounter to attack the other, thus bringing in elements of conflict similar to (dare we say it) *Magic*.

MYTHOS
The Cthulhu Collectable Card Game
COMING SOON

Mythos: shortly to arrive in the UK, promises to be a cracker.

Yes, we know – last issue we promised you a review of *Mythos* for this month, but, well, let's just say that those Servants of the Outer Gods have been at our mailbag again and the cards have yet to appear. Issue 7, however, should carry the definitive review of *Mythos*, so make sure you don't miss it. It's out on Friday 17th May.

There's no fixed price for the game in the UK as yet, but American 60-card Starters are to cost $8.95 and 13-card Booster Packs (of which there will be three sets available when the game is released) will cost $2.95.

And besides...

Fist follows through

Daedalus are beavering away on the second edition of their *Shadowfist* CCG. It will feature fewer cards – Deadalus are removing some of the less effective ones – a revamped rulebook (hurrah!), around 40 new cards, and information cards carrying fiction and frequently asked questions. Deadalus intend to make the game more exciting for players with Starter Decks, and to make it cheaper to build competitive decks. It's due for release in July.

Meanwhile, the latest expansion for *Shadowfist* is *Flashpoint*, which consists of over 140 cards and features gung-ho action against the Architects of the Flesh in the South American jungle.

Doctor Who's who

DOCTOR WHO
COLLECTABLE CARD GAME
STARTER DECK

Further to last month's report of a forthcoming *Dr Who* CCG, **arcane** can reveal that the company responsible are The Multimedia Group (the people who brought you the *X-Files* and *Baywatch* board games, among others…).

Community Chess

Coming in July from Steve Jackson Games is *Knightmare Chess*. Translated from the French, it's a mixture of chess and cards, with cards played modifying the rules of chess (for example, one card allows a knight to move like a bishop for one turn).

Decks will contain 80 full-colour cards with art by Brazilian Rogerio Vilela. *Knightmare Chess* is endorsed by Gary Kasparov (no, only kidding).

Further Oblivion

White Wolf continue their revamping spree (see the *Vampire* and *Mage 2nd Edition* reviews in last month's issue) with plans for a new *Wraith: The Oblivion*.

Come August you'll be able to sink your teeth into revised and expanded rules, new-look Harrowings, improved character creation, the chance to play another character's dark side, new fiction, an expanded cosmology and history, and a wider scope of action. Sounds dead good.

And besides...

Battling on

BattleTech, the game of technological battles, is to reach its fourth incarnation (and is, incidentally, now available in 13 languages). Makers FASA promise that it will be 'bigger, better and more colourful than before'. Out go the 14 plastic 'Mechs currently supplied with the game, and in come 24 pairs of die-cut 'Mech counters – a case of more variation, less dimension. We think we're hard enough, so we'll be having a go as soon as it's released.

Join the Rage machine

You can have your say in the shaping of the 'largest and most diverse' *Rage* expansion to date from White Wolf. The company is asking players to vote for their favourite Garou characters, and the most popular will re-appear, more powerful than before, in *Legacy of the Tribes*. White Wolf is accepting votes from now until 15th May. To cast your vote e-mail achilli@aol.com, telephone 001 404 292 1819 or drop a line to Rage Legacy Vote, c/o White Wolf Game Studio, 780 Park North Blvd, Ste 100, Clarkston GA 30021. Votes for Pat Buchanan, red-toothed though he may be, will not be accepted.

Bushido backlog

The release of the third edition of Gold Rush Games' *Bushido* has been put back until next year. The game, originally scheduled for an August release, has been delayed so that its quality can be increased and because of an expanded licensing agreement between Gold Rush Games and Hero Games.

Down, Dino, down!

Due in August from Steve Jackson Games is *Dino Hunt*. It's a card game of sorts – yes, they are collectable, with booster packs adding to those coming with the basic box to create a pool of 240 different cards – but with plenty of originality for all that. Between two and four players take on the roles of dinosaur hunters travelling back in time to capture dinosaurs and bring them back to the present for exhibition and study (and vivisection, no doubt…).

Cards represent dinosaurs and hunting equipment. On the reverse of each you'll find a set of educational notes describing what is known about the dinosaur and its habits – this, along with the quick-and-easy rules and plastic miniatures, make it clear that *Dino Hunt* is aimed primarily at youngsters.

Class Capers

The *AD&D* schools competition

POSITIVE EFFORTS TO expand our hobby are all to few and far between, so **arcane** has to take its imaginary hat off to TSR UK and its *AD&D* Schools Competition. Every year TSR goes on the road, travelling to schools all around the country and encouraging them to play in the competition, which has loads of eliminating heats, all leading to a grand final at *EuroGenCon* (see conventions panel for more info on that). The winners get a trip to *GenCon* in the States, the biggest roleplaying convention there is, and their schools benefit by getting lots of highly useful computer equipment.

DUNGEON MASTER
Dungeons & Dragons
Monstrous Manual
Dungeons & Dragons
PLAYER'S HANDBOOK
Dungeons & Dragons
Dungeons & Dragons
Night Below

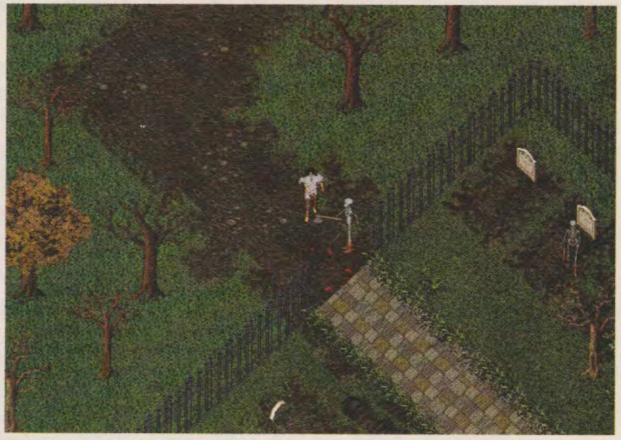
The competition this year has been covered by Carlton TV, who are hoping to make a documentary of the competition, and was supported by British Telecom who used the event to debut some experimental technology. DMs on the mainland were linked to participating teams on the Isle of Man by the use of computers hooked up to telephone lines. A camera on the top of the computer at each end sent pictures of the two sides to each other and they communicated by microphone: the DMs with stylish head pieces and the teams by means of an open mike on the table. It seemed to work surprisingly well and certainly proved no barrier to Castle Rushden School from the Isle of Man, who are one of the teams on their way to the final.

If you fancy getting involved in the competition next year, contact: Denise Lynes or John Brown at TSR Limited, 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB. Tel 01223 212517 Fax 10223 248066.

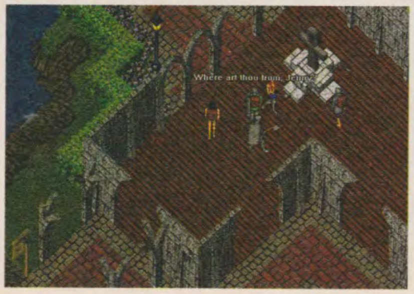
Ultima On-line

Could Origin have designed the ultimate MUD?

IT WAS MORE THAN 10 years ago when the first in the series of the *Ultima* computer RPGs was released by Origin Systems in the States. In the years that have passed the series has seen 11 games released (including the two excellent first-person-perspective *Underworld* titles), and news reaches us that there's a twelfth on its way. *Ultima On-line* is going to be drastically different from the previous releases, however, in that (no prizes for guessing this given the title) it's to be a highly sophisticated multi-user-game, featuring high-resolution graphics, a real-time world and a host of other features which will push your PC to it's very limits. So, if you've got a high-spec' PC connected to the Internet, you'll be able to take-part in huge games with other participating punters, interacting with each other and hundreds of NPCs, all with individual personalities and goals. Currently in a 'pre-Alpha' testing stage, *Ultima On-line* is still a long way off, but, hopefully, we'll be meeting each other in this virtual game world by the end of the year.



Ultima On-line marks a new step forward for multi-user-games.



Where art thou from, Jenny?

If you go down to the woods today...

Games Workshop release a new *Warhammer* supplement

All's quiet on the Games Workshop front until 6th May when the *Wood Elf Army* supplement is released – the first *Warhammer* source book for close to a year. The reclusive elves from the forest of Loren are reputed to be slightly weaker than the other *Warhammer* armies in terms of sheer brute force, but to make up for it they have big Mamma Nature on their side. So, given the Wood Elves usually only ever fight on their home turf, they are able to manipulate the battlefield terrain to their advantage. In games terms this means that Elven players may set up wooded scenery to suit his scouts, wardancers and archers, causing as much upset to the other player as possible. That sounds like quite an advantage, and should make some interesting battles.

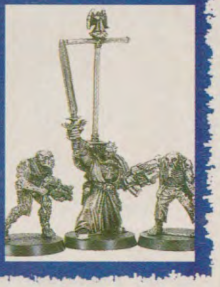
Miniature releases to back up the supplement are expected on 13th May and include Durfu and the Treeman Champion, to be followed by the Glade Rider Lancer and Archer Light Cavalry at a later date. Later still, an entirely new species is promised, in the form of the huge Forest Dragon.

Necromunda is also going native with the release of the feral Ratskin Renegades box-set on 22nd April; it contains a Shaman, Chieftain, four Ratskins and two Braves. These are to be followed by new Wyrd Psyker models including a Telepath and the final *Necromunda* gang: the Scavvies.

Finally, the vanguard of the Imperial Agent Codex is approaching, for Games Workshop have produced *Warhammer 40K* versions of the Adeptus Mechanicus Ordinatus vehicles currently only available in Epic scale. The models are made up of tractor and trailer pieces, with the trailer supporting an unfeasibly huge weapon (as is traditional for GW figures). Each kit is mainly metal, but also incorporates Chimera plastic tracks and wheels. Each model is quoted as costing 'around £14', though the release date is yet to be finalised. Phone GW on ☎ 01773 713213.

Separated at birth

Last issue's Hot Metal saw our finest mistake yet. In a bizarre sequence of events we managed to completely remove a gun from the arm of Games Workshop's Azrael figure and transfer it a Heartbreaker Legionnaire. Our first mistake was to photograph Azrael as one of the Legionnaires, as you can see from this picture. When we realised what we'd done we used *PhotoShop*, an image manipulation program, to separate Azrael from the group. Unfortunately his arm got left behind because it looked like it was connected to the Legionnaire on his right. We can only hope that Games Workshop and Heartbreaker will accept our apologies and not drive red-hot knitting needles into our soft eyes the next time they see us. We really are sorry, guys.



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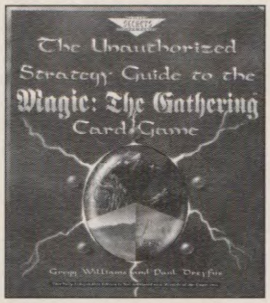
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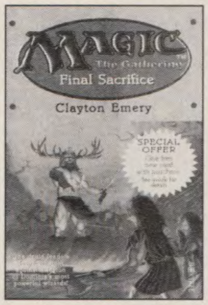

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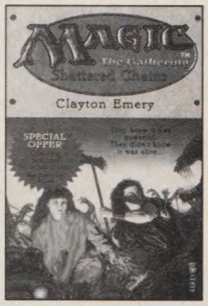

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BOXTREE

Free Magic cards!

arcane brings you *Magic: Alliances*

Next month sees a first for **arcane** – nestled inside the mag will be three cards from the forthcoming *Magic: The Gathering* expansion set *Alliances*. Yep, that's right, three free *Magic* cards for your enjoyment, and the first chance for us Brits to take a look at cards from the *Alliances* set, which is due for general release in June. The three cards are called: Foresight, Merfolk Explorer and Varchild Crusader, though we refuse to tell you any more than that now (you'll just have to wait and see...).

MAGIC The Gathering™

The 140 card set continues the *Ice Age* theme (and has, in fact, been designed by the same team who brought us the *Ice Age* cards) detailing the trials and tribulations of the peoples and creatures of the slowly thawing realm of Terisiare. *Alliances* isn't the only *Magic* expansion set you're likely to see hitting the already crowded shelves this year – there's another 300+ card set in the offing, called *Mirage*. That's to be another stand-alone set, similar to the *Ice Age* expansion. So, don't forget – buy **arcane** 7 for those free cards!

We really are sorry, guys (again)

In **arcane** 4, we wrongly stated that the 'On the Rocks' competition for Wasteland Games' *Point Blank: Redemption Through Violence* was run in association with Gamecraft of Liverpool, the British distributors of Heartbreaker products. The competition is, of course, being run in association with Wasteland Games, who else? Apologies to our Northern Irish friends. Also, we didn't include an entry deadline, so, let's say, erm, the end of May then. Oops.

COMPOS!

Win lots of books!

Sand in your eyes

Neil Gaiman's award-winning *Sandman* series has been described by *The Sunday Times* as 'spellbinding'. (For more erudite criticism, the reader is referred to the Great Library, where we review the latest compendium: *The Kindly Ones*.) Given that this new hardback collection of issues 57–69 would ordinarily set you back a pony, we thought it only fair to see that twenty people got one gratis. Titan Books agreed, but have set a test to find the most deserving of their magnanimous charity:

Q. 'Who is the Dream King?'

Send your answers to: 'Tori Amos is a fan of mine' competition, **arcane** 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW.
And... Only one entry each please.
No insider trading – we disapprove of sleaze.
The editor is king, in his dreams. But he is not the Dream King.

Titanic give-away

Titan Books, in yet another fit of unbridled altruism, have agreed to distribute ten copies of *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy and Science Fiction Art Techniques* (see The Great Library, **arcane** 5) to artists who can tell us:

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Q. 'Whose famous illustrations appeared in the first edition of Alice in Wonderland?'

Send your answers to: 'My art is my life' competition, **arcane** 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Do not ignore this counsel:
There's only one entrance per person into this Wonderland
Employees of Titan Books and Future Publishing are not invited to the tea party
The editor is our Queen of Hearts

Last of it's kind

Peter Beagle's *The Last Unicorn* is being re-released in paperback. We review it in The Great Library. And, in conjunction with the re-appearance of this fantasy classic, publishers Souvenir Press will provide ten free copies to **arcane** readers who correctly answer this question:

Q. 'What was Peter Beagle's first published novel?'

Send your answers to
'Where have all the unicorns gone, long time passing?' competition, **arcane** 30 Monmouth Street,
Bath BA1 2BW
Each entrant must only contribute as many entries as a unicorn has horns.
Future Publishing and Souvenir Press employees can keep their horns out
The editor's horn is the only one that counts, in the end.
All entries, for all competitions on this page should be in by Friday 31st May, otherwise you don't stand a chance.

Famous for 15 minutes

Roleplaying in America is treated more as a mainstream hobby than it is here in Britain and the stigma of being involved in something a lot of other people don't understand is perhaps less well marked. Why, even in the more sugary television dramas we can see its influence. Steven James of Strathclyde has contacted this office to inform us of the roleplaying antics of that cutest of pooches *The Littlest Hobo*. You know, the sickly sweet *Lassie* take-off with the mutt who thinks he's Kane off *Kung Fu*.

Steven can't remember the exact episode, because he watched it on STV at 3 o'clock in the morning a long time ago, but he tells of a 'backwoods' setting where the do-goodie doggie meets this bunch of kids who are pretending to be rangers, dwarves, wizards and the like. The dog helps them out and most surprisingly for our correspondent, at the end of the show the kids still liked their little game. There was no cornflake packet moral about the psychological degeneration caused by fantasy play and even the adults approved of what the kids were doing.

'Hurrah for the doggy!' says Steven. Well, that might be going a bit far but **arcane** will reward our man in late night TV with a T-shirt for this information forwarded to 15 minutes. If you've noticed roleplaying portrayed in the mass media, drop us a line. Maybe you know of an episode of *Little House on the Prairie* where they run a *Cyberpunk* campaign during the winter months, or something.

Write in to us at
15 Minutes, arcane,
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and be clothed...

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Conventions

You are not alone. There are many tens of thousands of gamers all around the country, and they're forever meeting up to at these convention thingies to discuss the fine arts of roleplaying, board and wargaming, card playing, dice rolling... to see and try out the latest releases, and to pick up new and second-hand bargains. Here's a list of the main events taking place over the next few months. Don't you think it's about time you took part?

Convention diary

27th April Dudley Bug Ball

Roleplaying and dice games with tournaments Albright & Wilson Recreation Centre, *Oldbury, W Midlands.* ***Contact Steve Turner,*** *94 Laurel Rd, Dudley, W Midlands DY1 3EZ,* ☎ **0121 420 5097**

email: bonna@dimension.win-uk.net

30th April-5th May Zine-Con 96

PBM and boardgames Hoechst, Germany ***Contact Lukas Kautzsch,*** *An der Rossweid 18a, D76229 Karlsruhe, Germany,* ☎ **+49 721 616815**

3-6th May Freyrsgildi

LRP *Ripley Castle, N Yorks* ***Contact*** ☎ **01282 705726** ☎ **01282 604895**

12th May Fantasy Fair

Fantasy and SF, including roleplaying and wargames. *The Cresset Exhibition Centre, Bretton, Peterborough* ***Contact Bruce King,*** *1 the Hallards, Eaton Socon, St Neots, Cambs PE19 3QW* ☎ **01480 216372**

18th May Fantasy Games Day

Play and see demos of TSR games Corn Exchange, Leeds. ***Contact TSR***, ☎ **01223 212517**

18-19th May Beer 'n' Pretzels Games Weekend

Burton-on-Trent. ***Contact Phil Bootherstone,*** *99/99 Horninglow St, Burton-on-Trent, Staffs DE14 1PJ,* ☎ **01283 511293**

continued over page

L2 to you

Labyrinthe launch new scf-fi LARP system

LIVE ACTION ROLEPLAYERS will be more than pleased to hear that the extremely well-established Labyrinthe company is close to completing its new science fiction LARP system. *L2* is a post-apocalyptic game, set a thousand years after the vast majority of human-kind was wiped out by a 'rampaging alien virus' (no less), and players adopt the roles of humans who, stranded on a space colony, are attempting to re-open gateways which will take them to colonies populated by their long-lost fellows.

Combat takes a back seat in the proceedings, with 'problem solving, inventive skill and... roleplaying' being the primary goals within the hour hour long scenarios. Between six and eight players are intended to participate in a game, and if you'd like more information, get in contact with **Labyrinthe on** ☎ **01689 855851.**

Win TSR Books

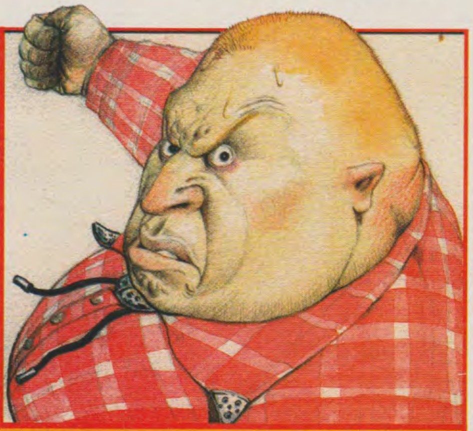
Dungeons & Dragons
The Rod of Seven Parts
Douglas Niles

The Rod of Seven Parts has been called the holy grail of *AD&D* literature. Now it's a newly released hardback novel by Douglas Niles. Publisher TSR has got itself caught up in the hysteria surrounding the publication of this vitally important tome and have offered 12 copies to **arcane** readers. No question, just send in your name and address to: 'I'll get a whole campaign out of this' competition, **arcane** 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW

The deadline for this competitions is: 31st May 1996. Don't be late!

SEYMOUR J CLANCY III'S GREAT OUTING

With so much blasphemous editorial this month, we thought it only right to air the other side of the argument – over to you Seymour...



Ah have an impotent annoyancement to mayek concerning the domestic donnybrook defined as DIPLOMATS & DISCOTHEQUES. Hitherto-ly unbeknownst to mah-sayelf ah can now confirm that Beelzebub's babies do abide at the BBC.

Wahl ah have never bin opposed to satire and irony, ah do fahnd it disturbing to note the Experiences of Mary Whitehouse on the telly-vishun. First ah cheered to hear roleplayers descrahbed as 'those people with NHS glasses and anoraks that invite other children round to their houses to play funny games called D&D and worry all the parents in their street.' But ah was not then aware that this was but a tongue-in-cheek chiding and that these jesters are in fact of the DARK ONES and merely masquerading as morality-mongers. For indeed, it is quite obviously apparent that these are not Mirey Whitearse at all but are ROLEPLAYERS IN DISGUISE.

Ah know what D&D stands for. It is a matter of indispicable fact it is an anachronism of DHOWS & DESCARTES, a roleplaying game wherein French Filosofiles do board lateen-rigged sailing vessels and go round in circles looking for JESUS. Now they are exposed. It's another victory for decency over common sense – a triumph (*Snip* –Ed).

Seymour is much obliged to Ross Hulme of Huntingdon who noticed that the comics involved in 'The Mary Whitehouse Experience' are quite obviously avid roleplayers. If you think you know of a celebrity who indulges, however tenuous or circumstantial the evidence, please tell Seymour. He's recently taken delivery of a fresh consignment of **arcane** T-shirts and will happily exchange them for information that might lead to the public ridicule of famous roleplayers of any descripton. Write to him at the usual address, marking your envelope 'Ah have a Crewsade'.

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Conventions

25-27th May Great British Games Festival
All aspects of gaming. *Old Ship Hotel, Brighton.* ***Contact SFCP,*** *42 Wyndale Rd, London E18 1DX,* ☎ **0171 358 1613** `email: gbgf@sfcp.co.uk`

5-7th July Ambercon UK
Amber diceless roleplaying. *Hilton National, Croydon.* ***Contact Simone Cooper*** *4 The Beeches, 193 Boston Rd, Hanwell, London W7 2JU,* `email: simone@wyrdrune.demon.co.uk`

6-7th July Games Workshop 1996 Grand Tournament
Leicester University **Contact Games Workshop 1996 Grand Tournament,** *Games Workshop Mail Order, Chewton Street, Hilltop, Eastwood, Nottingham NG16 3HY* ☎ **01773 713213**

12-14th July StabCon 96
Woolton Hall, Fallowfield, Manchester ***Contact Stabcon,*** *17 Davenport Park Rd, Stockport, Cheshire SK2 6JU,* `email: hammy@riverbank.win-uk.net`

13-14th July DrakCon 96
Roleplaying and CCGs with tournaments *Northern College of Education, Aberdeen* ***Contact Sandy Douglas,*** *5 Cottage Brae, Nellfield Place, Aberdeen, Scotland AB1 6DG,* `email: ncect6@rmplc.co.uk, web: www.drakcon.wintermute.co.uk/drakcon`

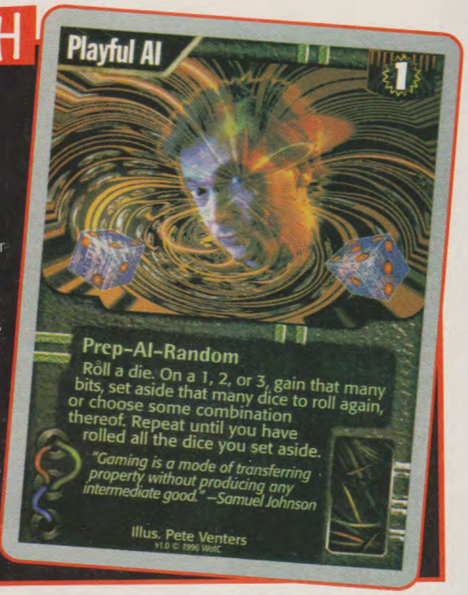
13-14th July Battlemasters IV
Roleplaying, CCGs, board and wargames *The Carlton Suite, Hagley Rd, Birmingham Contact EuroLoG, 46 High St, Herne Bay, Kent CT6 5LH,* ☎ **01227 741624**

19-21st July Convulsion 3D
Roleplaying with tournaments *Stamford Hall, Leicester* ***Contact David Hall,*** *Convulsion, 21 Stephenson Court, Osbourne Street, Slough, Berks SL1 1TN*

Just a quick note to let you know that **Euro Gen Con –** ***the roleplaying event of the year*** **–** will be taking place at *Loughborough University on 5-8th September.* They're taking bookings now. ☎ **01223 212517.**

CARD OF THE MONTH

Playful AI



Roll a die. On a 1, 2, or 3, gain that many bits, set aside that many dice to roll again, or choose some combination thereof. Repeat until you have rolled all the dice you set aside.

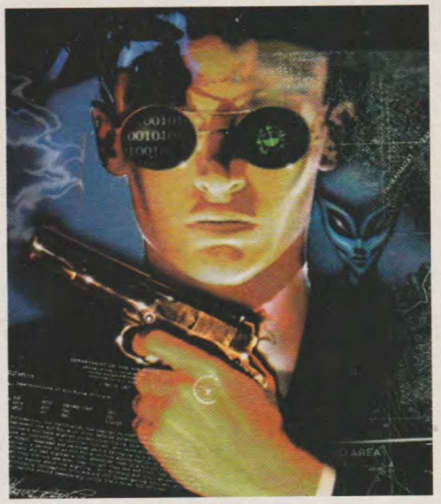
"Gaming is a mode of transferring property without producing any intermediate good." –Samuel Johnson

We've all been playing the superb *Netrunner* since we managed to get hold of the cards earlier in the month, and there was one card in particular which immediately grabbed our attention. Playful AI isn't a particularly powerful card, and neither is it hugely useful. However, the illustration is a photograph of the game's creator, Richard Garfield (yes, he of *Magic: The Gathering* fame and top, all-round chap). Typically for a man who's pretty well dedicated his life to gaming, the card has you rolling a die for bits (money in the game), and is entirely based on chance.

Well, that was our choice, but what's yours? If you've been using, or if you've simply seen a card which caught your eye this month, let us know. It doesn't have to be new, or great, or anything else in particular. It simply has to be appealing. Drop us a line at: Card of the Month, **arcane** 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW.

Conspiracy X

Is the truth really out there?



Were the mysterious 'Foo Fighters' of World War II really a secret German weapon system? What actually happened in the desert outside Roswell in 1947? Why do the rich get richer and the poor get poorer? What is the government really paying for when it shells out 75 dollars for a screwdriver?

Coming soon from New Millennium Entertainment, *Conspiracy X* promises to answer these questions and more. Set in a world that – on the surface at least – seems identical to ours, this new roleplaying game confronts players with deadly secrets and hidden agendas in a struggle to save humanity itself. Cast as members of Aegis, an ultra-secret organisation dedicated to fighting a covert war against extraterrestrial and supernatural threats, players in *Conspiracy X* enter a world where UFOs, aliens, evil horrors and psychic powers are very real.

HERMES
WARNING: THIS IS A TOP SECRET - EYES ONLY DOCUMENT
CONTAINING COMPARTMENTALIZED INFORMATION ESSENTIAL

Drawing its inspiration from sources as diverse as *The X-Files, V,* HP Lovecraft and any number of conspiracy theories and unexplained mysteries, as well as several unique twists all of its own, *Conspiracy X* certainly looks like being an interesting game. Look out for a full review in the next issue of arcane, and check out the game's web site at `http://www.wizvax.net/nmegames/conspiracyx/1933.html` for more information.

Get On Your Soapbox

As of **arcane** 8 we'll be giving you the chance to air your views on the hobby with our new Soapbox column. Write 500 words on something that you feel strongly about and send it in.

Write to: Get On Your Soapbox arcane
30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW

COMPO WINNERS

'Eric, I feel so safe when I'm with you' competition winners

Pietro Barbi of Modena in Italy, Joff Brown of Bishop's Stortford, Robin Diston of Truro, Debra Jones of Chorley and Julie Ann Robinson of Liverpool

'On the Rocks' competition winners

Jonathan Baddeley of Newcastle-under-Lyme, Chris Crockford of Watchet, Ian Dryland of Ashford, Adrian Hill of Sheffield, Paul Hodgson of Chester, James McClellan of Portsmouth, Daniel Scholefield of Maidstone, Eyal Teler of Jerusalem, Mark Thomas of Walthamstow and D C Thompson of Peterborough

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You think your troubles are over when you're washed ashore. Oh no! With your favourite sword lost beneath the ocean waves and a 12 foot Octopaw staring at you, with a craving for your eyeballs as hors d'oeuvres, they've only just started. Welcome to Monster Island...

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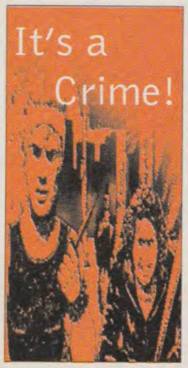
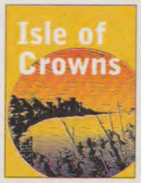
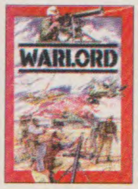
The World of Play by Mail

Established in 1981 KJC are Europe's No.1 Play by Mail organisation. Our games are operated in 10 other countries and 5 different languages. Some of our titles include fantasy role playing, science fiction, street crime, war games and even a soccer league.

Beyond the Stellar Empire







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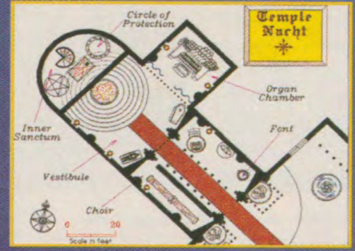

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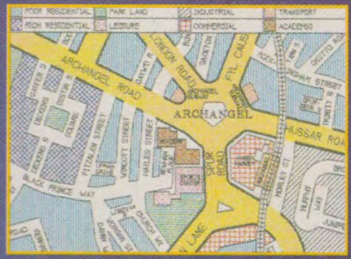

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A RICHARD GARFIELD GAME
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arcane
COMPETITION
in association with Wizards of the Coast

IF YOU'VE ALREADY READ our review of Richard Garfield's latest collectable card game, *Netrunner* (page 56), you'll know that we rather liked it. In fact, we can safely say that it's the best new card game to come through **arcane's** door so far. Not only does it capture the feel and atmosphere of cyberpunk fiction, but it plays like a dream, and is the first CCG to feature two completely different sets of rules and cards, one for the Runner, the other for the Corporation.

To celebrate the game's release Wizards of the Coast are running one of the most ambitious (and fun) Internet competitions we've seen. If you've got access to the World Wide Web on the Internet, you've still got just enough time to enter, as the competition closes on April 30. With prizes including a Pentium laptop PC and loads of other impressive kit, it's well worth taking a look. Use the link from arcane's Web Site at:

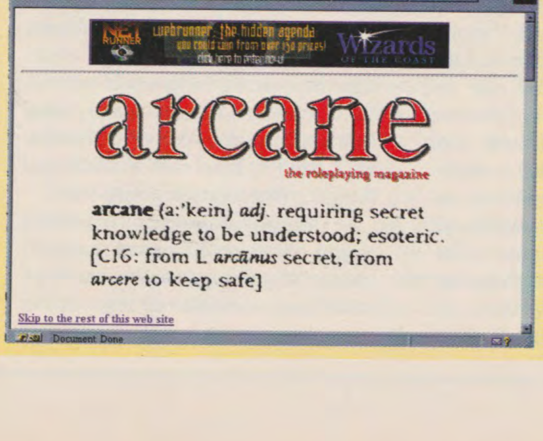
`http://www.futurenet.co.uk/entertainment/arcane.htm`

Of course, not everyone has access to the World Wide Web, so those jolly nice chaps at Wizards of the Coast have given us five *Netrunner* Starter Decks to give away. Each contains both a Runner and a Corporation deck – a total of 120 cards – and the game is playable straight out of the box (although it would probably be a good idea to read the rules first).

To be one of five lucky winners, all you have to do is answer the following question:

Q. What is the name of the roleplaying game from R Talsorian, on which *Netrunner* is based?

The first five correct answers drawn from our special cardboard Data Fort will win. To enter just send us the answer on a postcard or E-mail, clearly marked 'The future's so bright, I gotta wear shades'. Post cards should be sent to **arcane**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW, and E-mails to arcane@futurenet.co.uk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arcane (a:'kein) *adj*. requiring secret knowledge to be understood; esoteric. [C16: from L *arcānus* secret, from *arcere* to keep safe]

Rules

1. The closing date is May 30, 1996.
2. Employees of Future Publishing, Wizards of the Coast and R Talsorian Games attempting to enter will be hunted down by corporate hit squads and made to pay for their crime.
3. Likewise, sneaky readers who attempt to enter more than once will be tagged by our competition monitoring AI and their entries trashed.
4. Much like a corporate CEO, the editor's decision is final, and no correspondence will be entered into, no matter how nicely you ask. So there.

next month in arcane

HORROR!

Do you want to make your players' skin crawl? In our cover feature in **arcane** 7 we'll be treading with trepidation into the dark worlds of your nightmares, describing what makes the perfect horror scenario and taking a look at how to scare the living daylights out of your roleplaying groups.

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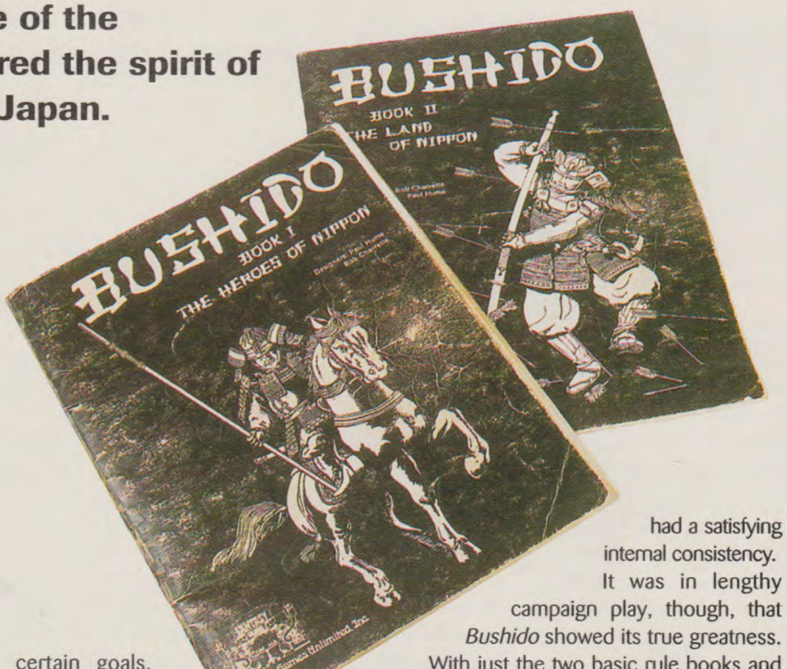
RETRO

Bushido

Designed by Bob Charette and Paul Hume   Fantasy Games Unlimited   First published in 1981

Literally meaning 'the warrior code of the Samurai', *Bushido* from FGU captured the spirit of the Samurais' greatest era: feudal Japan. Steve Faragher remembers it well.



RIGHT FROM THE VERY beginning this game was a challenge to my group. For a start, it was the first time we were introduced to a points-based character generation system – no rolling dice for stats? We were non-plussed.

Still, at least the character classes were easily recognisable – once you got past the names of course: Ninja we all knew, and one bright spark had heard of Yakuza before, but Bushi, Budoka, Gakusho and Shugenja? We were going to have to learn a whole new language… Still, at least they turned out to mean fighter, thief, priest, magic-user, martial artist and, er, ninja. But we never referred to them by their English equivalents, and that was the real strength of *Bushido*. It presented referees with a completely authentic fantasy world – authentic because it was real, or at least based on the heroic fiction of Japan.

Sure, the language was all new, and the names of everything had to be learned, but it wasn't long before we were happily using our Wakizashis and Katanas to carve up Ronin. On top of this there were lots of new concepts to learn – your effectiveness in action was moderated by your Zanshin (or 'overwhelming mental dominance in combat'), you possessed Ki ('inner strength') points that could be expended in moments of extraordinary need – to carry on fighting below zero hit points, for example – and, best of all, you had On.

On was a great idea. Each character class in *Bushido* had six levels and to advance a level you had to collect Budo (experience points) by fighting or casting spells or achieving certain goals. But as well as having the correct amount of Budo, you had to have enough On, or honour. On points were given out by the referee to characters who did things well, and they were used to encourage good roleplaying that stayed within the character of feudal Japan. So you earned On for winning fights, going on pilgrimages, duelling, defending your Lord – basically for doing things that other people in the game would recognise as honourable acts.

Another great thing about *Bushido* was that the Gakusho, or priests, had a much better role to perform than *AD&D* clerics. Gakusho were specialists in dealing with the spirit realm, and as such had a whole range of spells that concentrated on understanding and (where necessary) exorcising spirits. This was due to the fact that there was a definite historical and fictional background to draw on, meaning that everything in *Bushido* had a satisfying internal consistency.

It was in lengthy campaign play, though, that *Bushido* showed its true greatness. With just the two basic rule books and a quick reading of some of the many, easily available collections of stories about feudal Japan, you were up and running. The rules system lent itself easily to the incorporation of some of the things that were difficult to do in other games. As the players progressed in levels they also progressed in status – and the recognition that they deserved came to them because it was written into the rules. Over time your player characters became some of the most important people in the land, with poems written about them and with significant presences at court. Soldiers would become generals, Ninja would become Clan Leaders, Gakusho would found their own temples. Politics and action went hand in hand with *Bushido* and the game had an innately epic scale.

The many sessions of *Bushido* I've played and refereed in during my 16 years of roleplaying remain some of the most fondly remembered sessions I've ever taken part in.

Gold Rush Games are due to release a revised edition of *Bushido*. Unfortunately, this won't be happening until 1997 at the earliest.

Bob Charette and Paul Hume are still very active in the roleplaying world, and were both influential in the creation of FASA's *Shadowrun* game.

COLUMN

Thought for the day

This month I want to talk about some paranoid, narrow-minded bigots who aren't interested in anyone's viewpoint but their own. After I'm done with gamers, I'll get around to talking about the moral majority, too.

ANDREW RILSTONE

Andrew is the editor of *Interactive Fantasy,* the journal of roleplaying and story-making systems, and is also a regular contributor to arcane.

The religious right have, in the last ten years or so, added *D&D* to their long, long list of Abominations Unto The Lord – even though He inadvertently forgot to mention the game to the writers of the Bible.

I am not going to waste any time reminding you that most of what they say is not true. Well, okay, let me just point out that *D&D* doesn't contain a word about how to cast 'real' spells, and that *D&D* players do not commit suicide any more often than anyone else. Full stop, end of argument.

Except that it isn't the end of the argument, is it? Year after year gamers churn out reams of heartfelt prose 'defending' themselves against 'the moral majority'. I've come across people for whom proving that RPGs are not Satanic is a good deal more important than actually playing them.

These 'defences' are often every bit as blinkered and extreme as the tracts that they are responding to. You'll find them using words like 'paranoid', 'sinister', 'irrational', 'intolerant', 'bigoted' and 'drivel'. Is this the voice of sweet moderation? How do the writers of such defences expect gamers like me – who are followers of The Big Guy Upstairs – to feel when we're told that our faith is 'irrational'?

This sort of argument is, to put it plainly, lacking in intellectual integrity. Find out what the 'anti-gamers' are *really* saying. Try to understand their case. Otherwise, you've simply got no business telling them they are wrong. If you set up a straw target like Seymour J Clancey III and make him the object of your attack then you are (as they say in the superhero comics) Just as Bad as Them.

In particular, could we please lay the following fallacies to rest?

1 All Christians hate roleplayers.

Some Christians *are* roleplayers. Most of the others, like most of the rest of the population of the world, wouldn't know a roleplaying game if God dropped one on their heads during the third verse of *All People That On Earth Do Dwell.*

2 Only fanatics and extremists criticise games.

Granted, you can't get much more crazy than Jack Chick, author of *Dark Dungeon.* But then, you can't get much more middle-of-the-road than the General Synod of the Church of England. One of their committees expressed some very restrained, Anglican concern that a game called – you guessed? – *Dungeons & Dragons* was teaching children an un-Christian view of the world. Maybe they were right and maybe they were wrong, but anyone who tells you that all anti-gamers are clones of Pat Pulling simply doesn't know the facts.

3 Roleplaying games contain nothing to offend Christians.

C'mon. Get real. *Nephilim* says that Jesus Christ was a 'zero Arcanum Nephilim'. Dunno what that means, but it isn't what they told us at Sunday School. Two recent games – *The End* and *The Rapture* – mess around with Christian beliefs about the Second Coming. Steve Jackson may one day get around to actually publishing *In Nomine,* which was originally called *In Nomine Satanis.* It is a bit rich to produce games that are clearly intended to irritate Christians and then come over all surprised when Christians are irritated by them.

4 There is no occult content in roleplaying games.

This is, if you'll pardon my French, bollocks. The author of *Pendragon* and *Runequest* is a shaman; *Nephilim* carries an endorsement from a wiccan elder; the authors of *Shadowrun* got a ritual magician in to make the magic system authentic; and *Everway* is about as unashamedly New Age as you can get. You may have no problem with this; you may like it. Fine. It's a free country.

Are there any devout atheists reading this? Don't you think you might freak out if you found one of your kiddies playing a game based on fundamentalist beliefs? Wouldn't you be tempted to ask him to stop? Do you begin to understand where the fundamentalists are coming from?

And that, in the end, is all I am asking for. Pretending that our opponents are monsters does no good – even if we feel that is how they are viewing us. It's only by trying to understand others – even those who we find it difficult to respect – that we can hope to make them understand us.

Here endeth the sermon. There will be coffee and biscuits in the vestibule after the last hymn.

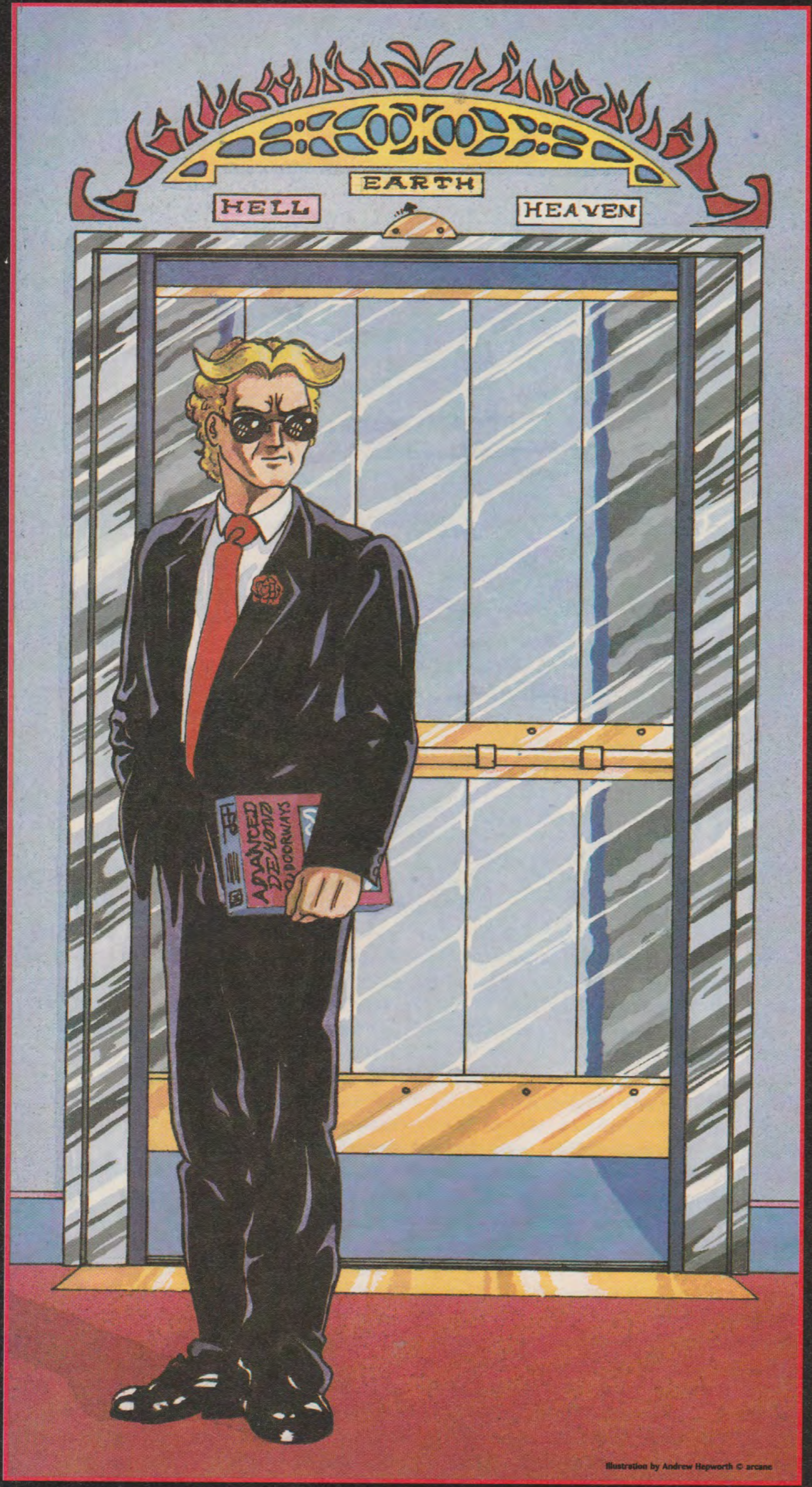


Illustration by Andrew Hepworth © arcane

DIC

Religious fundament

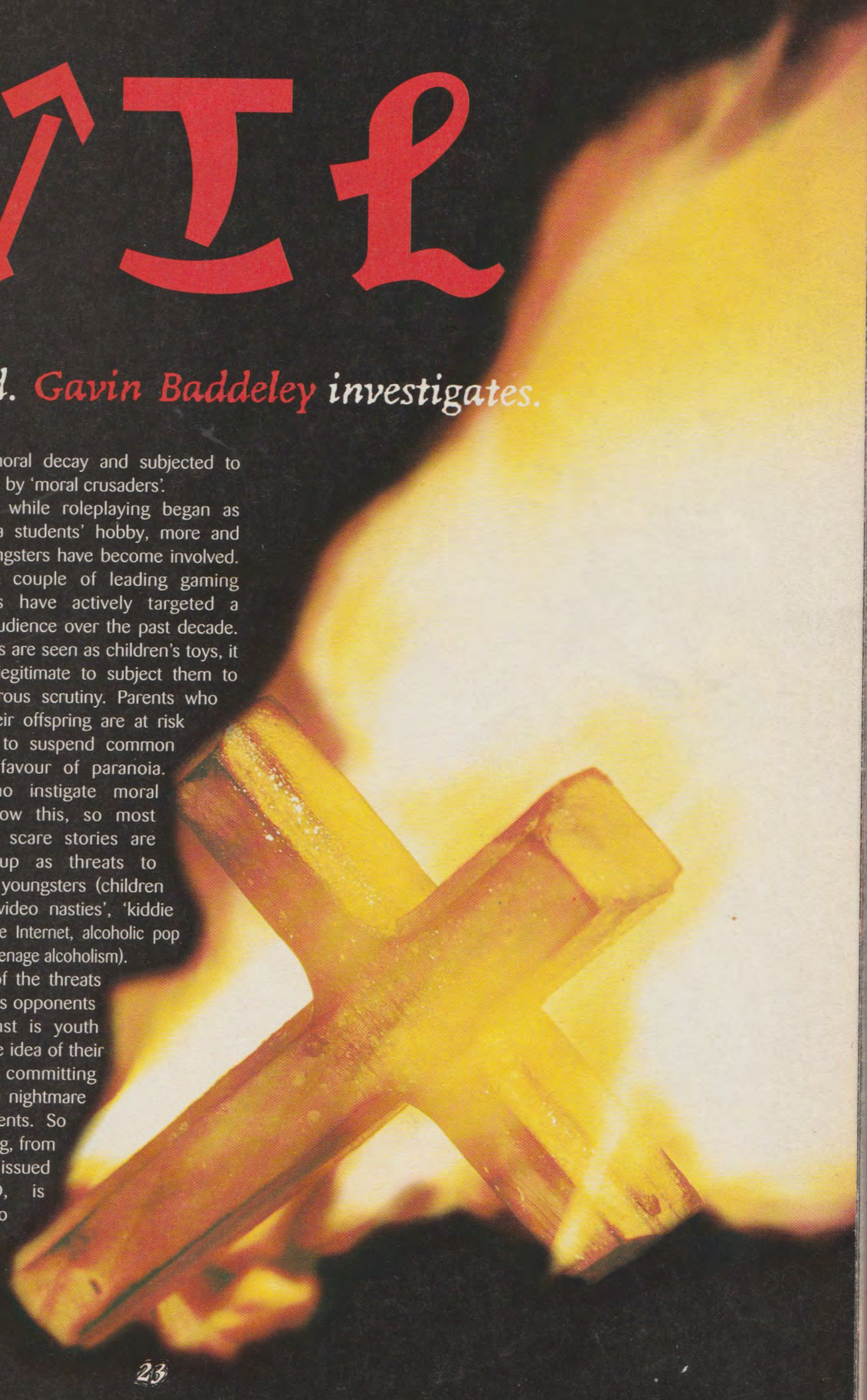
The problem of how to describe fantasy roleplaying to outsiders is one that's been addressed by the gaming community on many occasions. Could you call it interactive fiction? Theatre of the mind? A highly sophisticated version of 'let's pretend'? A 'Family Forum' of the Christian Life Ministries, after 'extensive research' into the nature of *Dungeons & Dragons*, came to the conclusion that it isn't a game but a 'teaching on demonology, witchcraft, voodoo, murder, rape, blasphemy, suicide, assassination, insanity, sex perversion, homosexuality, prostitution, Satan worship, gambling, Jungian psychology, barbarism, cannibalism, sadism, desecration, demon summoning, necromantics and divination'. With all that in the basic set, I wonder what you get in *Advanced Dungeon & Dragons*?

The above pronouncement on the evils of *D&D* is not an isolated outburst. The kind of 'moral crusader' parodied by **arcane**'s Seymour J Clancy III has been campaigning against roleplaying games for well over a decade. Their initial aims include having roleplaying banned from schools, colleges and public buildings,

"It isn't a game but a teaching on demonology, witchcraft, voodoo, murder, rape…"

NG WITH THE DEVIL

ts are after roleplaying's blood. **Gavin Baddeley** *investigates.*



applying pressure to discourage retailers from carrying RPG products, and convincing parents that gaming represents a danger to their children. In other words, they'd like to see roleplaying games banned (although their methods allow the more media-literate among them to claim they're not advocating censorship as such). Why are these people so vehemently opposed to RPGs? And just who the Hell are they?

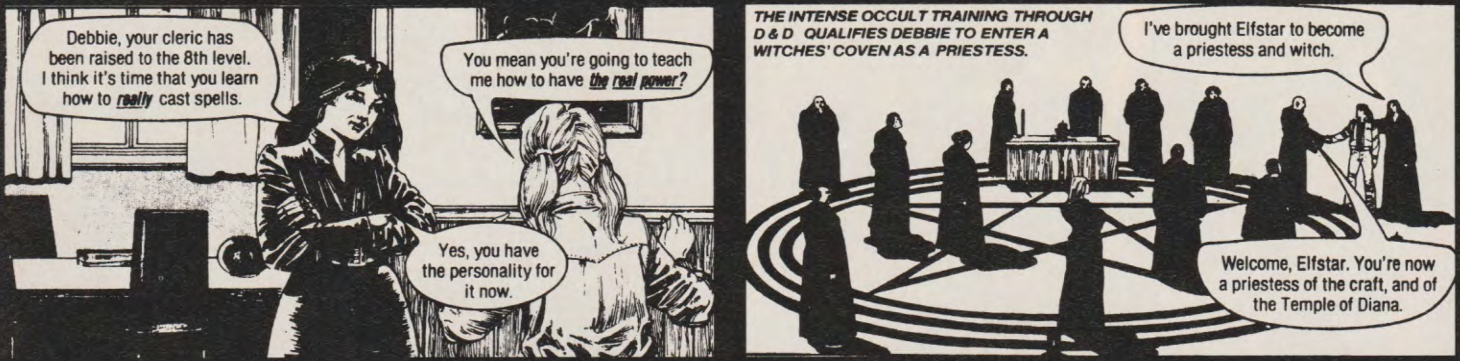
The most consistently high-profile campaigners against RPGs are BADD (Bothered About *Dungeons & Dragons*). BADD were formed by American private investigator Pat Pulling after her son committed suicide in 1982, motivated, she says, by his passion for *D&D*. Since the group's formation, BADD have documented over 100 cases of what they describe as '*D&D* deaths' – suicides and homicides motivated by RPGs.

BADD are not alone. Organisations including Chick Publications, Media Spotlight, the Pro-Family Forum and many others, on both sides of the Atlantic, have been preaching a similar message.

Part of the reason is that the hobby represents a soft target: despite its remarkable commercial success over the past 20 years, it's still a fringe pastime. To many, it comes across as a weird or even slightly suspect activity. Pastimes as diverse as pinball, theatre going, dancing and watching videos have all, at some time or other, been condemned as causing moral decay and subjected to campaigns by 'moral crusaders'.

Also, while roleplaying began as primarily a students' hobby, more and more youngsters have become involved. Indeed, a couple of leading gaming companies have actively targeted a younger audience over the past decade. Once RPGs are seen as children's toys, it becomes legitimate to subject them to more rigorous scrutiny. Parents who believe their offspring are at risk are quick to suspend common sense in favour of paranoia. Those who instigate moral panics know this, so most successful scare stories are wrapped up as threats to vulnerable youngsters (children watching 'video nasties', 'kiddie porn' on the Internet, alcoholic pop leading to teenage alcoholism).

One of the threats roleplaying's opponents warn against is youth suicide. The idea of their children committing suicide is a nightmare for all parents. So the following, from a pamphlet issued by BADD, is calculated to grab the attention


Debbie, your cleric has been raised to the 8th level. I think it's time that you learn how to *really* cast spells.
You mean you're going to teach me how to have *the real power?*
Yes, you have the personality for it now.
THE INTENSE OCCULT TRAINING THROUGH D & D QUALIFIES DEBBIE TO ENTER A WITCHES' COVEN AS A PRIESTESS.
I've brought Elfstar to become a priestess and witch.
Welcome, Elfstar. You're now a priestess of the craft, and of the Temple of Diana.

The cartoons reproduced on these pages are from a Jack Chick book called *Dark Dungeons*, and are copyright Jack Chick. Jack Chick has created a whole range of these books on subjects as diverse as Catholics and rock 'n' roll – all are as unintentionally hilarious as this. Check out his Web site at http://dig.netcentral.net/vx/jackhome.html

of the concerned, uninformed parent: "With 6,500 teens committing suicide and over 50,000 attempts every year, we cannot afford to overlook a 'game' that teaches the philosophies of witchcraft, Satan worship and a cult-like institution, not to mention specific suicide phrases." It then goes on to list the names of adolescent suicide victims which, it stresses, "WERE HEAVILY INVOLVED IN *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*."

Setting aside the nonsense about RPGs teaching 'the philosophies of witchcraft, Satan worship and a cult-like institution' for a moment, what's this about 'specific suicide phrases'? Without exception, the names dragged up by BADD and their allies as examples of RPG-inspired suicide are far from clear-cut cases. These were young people with profound behavioural problems – drug abuse, bad parenting and emotional disturbance are regular elements in the recipe. To blame *D&D* is comforting for grieving parents, and a good way to offload any guilt they may feel, but it's also blatant scapegoating.

The case of Pat Pulling's son Bink is revealing. Michael Stackpole, in an article for the book *Satanism in America*, made a study of Pulling's methods, including her selective editing of newspaper reports of suicides for use in BADD literature: 'In the section of the article [*about her son's suicide*] Pulling did not print, the following appeared: "'He had a lot of problems anyway that weren't associated with the game,' said Victoria Rockercharlie, another classmate of Pulling in the Talented and Gifted program." Although she presents herself as totally surprised by her son's death, at least in BADD publications, Mrs Pulling was aware of her son's problems. During a seminar at the North Colorado/South Wyoming Detective association 9–12th Sept 86, she said her son had been displaying 'lycanthropic' tendencies such as running around the back yard barking. Within the month before his death, 19 rabbits Bink had raised were inexplicably torn apart and a cat was disembowelled with a knife. It seems clear that Bink Pulling was a disturbed youth.'

In their book *The Seduction of Our Children*, evangelists Neil T Anderson and John Russo assert: "Since 1979, fantasy roleplaying games have been linked with suicides, murders, and mysterious disappearances across the country," going on to say that, "Our research showed that 44% of the kids who play the game have compulsive thoughts to kill!" (probably aimed at Messrs Anderson and Russo). Other evangelists have also made lists of youth murders that, they imply, were inspired by RPGs. In her book *The Devil's Web: Who Is Stalking Your Children?* Pat

Neil Gaiman told **arcane** an intiguing story when we had him on the phone to interview him for Despatches. When he was a freelance journalist he had a ring from *Today* newspaper, he recalls this as being just before Rupert Murdoch took it over. He was told that as he knew a lot about fantasy and had some friends who played *D&D* he had been selected to write a cover feature for them on the satanic dangers of roleplaying. He refused to do it and the story never appeared.

Dragonraid: The christian discipleship game

There's a christian roleplaying game, you know...

Dragonraid – published by Adventures for Christ, price $19.00 (or available as shareware from ftp://earth.usa.net/users/dragonraid).

Why should the devil have all the good games? A lot of great fantasy has been written by devoutly religious authors. So when evangelist Dick Wulf sat down to devise a Christian antidote to *D&D*, he might have produced something as charming as CS Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* or as magnificent as JRR Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.

Instead, he produced *Dragonraid*.

Players take on the roles of the Twice-Born, people who the Overlord of Many Names sends out from their home in the Liberated Lands with the mission of rescuing the Once-Born from the clutches of the Great Red Dragon. The poor Once-Born are so thoroughly ensnared (tempted to distraction by wicked material possessions such as, and I quote, 'stone cottages and flower gardens'!) that some of them don't even realise that they are the Dragon's slaves. Stop me if all this symbolism is too cryptic for you.

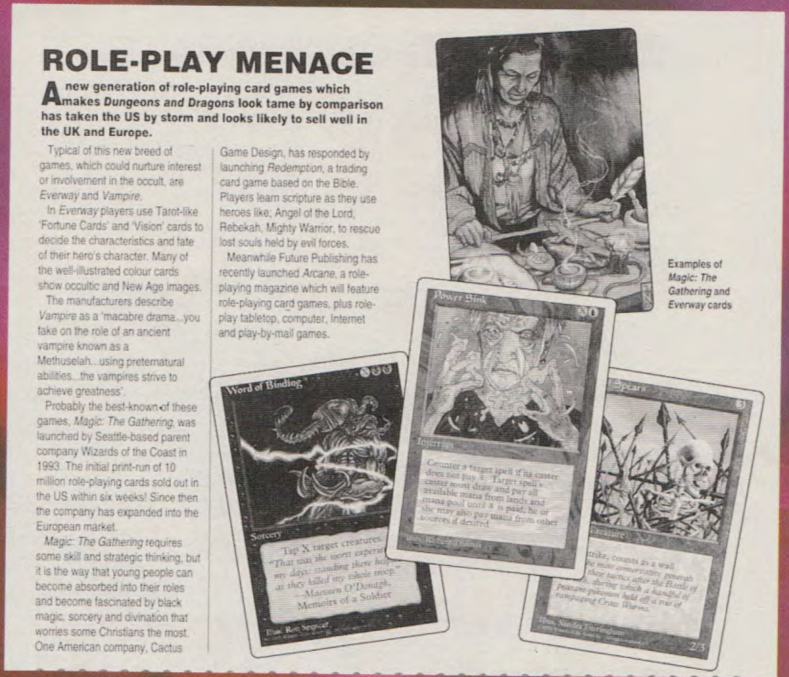
Occasionally, the game is quite imaginative. The account of how the Overlord gave his life to cover the Twice-Born's retreat (turning himself into a huge wave to quench the Dragon's fire) is particularly nice. But on the whole it teeters between the banal and the unintentionally comic. Characters basic attributes are – get this – Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Gentleness, Faithfulness and Self-Control. Their skills are derived from these basic attributes. This produces some charming results: someone with a high Joy rating is a better swimmer than a miserable so and so...

You also get spells ('word runes') that are cast by reciting verses from the Bible. Mr Wulf thinks that rote-learning Scripture is a Good Thing. He promises Christian America that: '*Dragonraid* produces Big Results... players memorize from 50 to 100 Bible passages per year'. Unfortunately for him, Christian America was unimpressed. The game was condemned as 'heretical, New Age and demonic', and the publishers went bankrupt.

vengeance is mine, sayeth the lord?

Do they mean us?

***Youthworks* is a British magazine for Christians who work with young people, and this is from their latest issue. Although they're pretty careful not to say anything unpleasant about arcane it is a rather strange headline for a balanced article, wouldn't you say?**



ROLE-PLAY MENACE

A new generation of role-playing card games which makes *Dungeons and Dragons* look tame by comparison has taken the US by storm and looks likely to sell well in the UK and Europe.

Typical of this new breed of games, which could nurture interest or involvement in the occult, are *Everway* and *Vampire*.

In *Everway* players use Tarot-like 'Fortune Cards' and 'Vision' cards to decide the characteristics and fate of their hero's character. Many of the well-illustrated colour cards show occultic and New Age images.

The manufacturers describe *Vampire* as a 'macabre drama...you take on the role of an ancient vampire known as a Methuselah...using preternatural abilities...the vampires strive to achieve greatness'.

Probably the best-known of these games, *Magic: The Gathering*, was launched by Seattle-based parent company Wizards of the Coast in 1993. The initial print-run of 10 million role-playing cards sold out in the US within six weeks! Since then the company has expanded into the European market.

Magic: The Gathering requires some skill and strategic thinking, but it is the way that young people can become absorbed into their roles and become fascinated by black magic, sorcery and divination that worries some Christians the most. One American company, Cactus Game Design, has responded by launching *Redemption*, a trading card game based on the Bible. Players learn scripture as they use heroes like; Angel of the Lord, Rebekah, Mighty Warrior, to rescue lost souls held by evil forces.

Meanwhile Future Publishing has recently launched *Arcane*, a role-playing magazine which will feature role-playing card games, plus role-play tabletop, computer, Internet and play-by-mail games.

Examples of *Magic: The Gathering* and *Everway* cards

Pulling even includes an appendix for law enforcement agencies, listing evidence to look for at the scene (dice, graph paper and the like) to determine if a crime is related to roleplaying games.

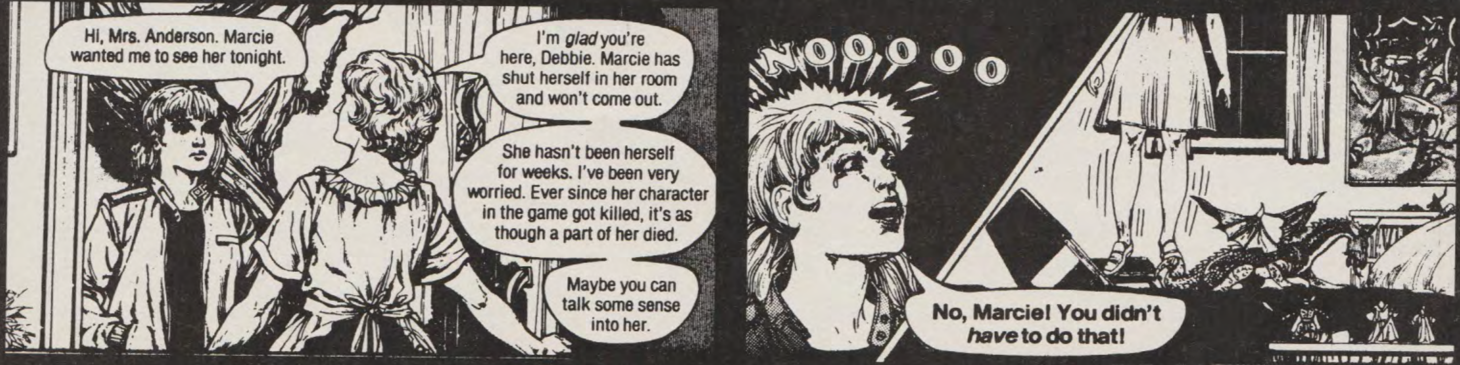
It would be nice to think that no-one listens to this kind of drivel, but it does leak through and influence society at large. In the US, there are what have become known as 'cult cops' – police officers influenced by their own fundamentalist Christian beliefs. They attend the spurious 'occult-busting' seminars led by Pat Pulling and her (wholly unqualified) fellow 'experts' on the occult and dangers of *D&D*, lending authority to the activities of BADD and others. In the UK the police have, overall, remained far more sober and level-headed over the paranoid claims made by fundamentalist groups. But our tabloid newspapers are less scrupulous about factual details when colourful stories, like those conjured up by fundamentalists about '*D&D* deaths', are concerned. Most notably, a half-baked attempt was made by a segment of the gutter press to blame Michael Ryan's murderous rampage in Hungerford on a fantasy play-by-mail game. ('Video nasties' were also implicated, even though Ryan didn't own a video player.)

Things become more sinister when defence lawyers and psychiatrists use defences of 'addiction to *Dungeons & Dragons*' during the trials of young robbers, rapists and murderers. According to an article in the Christian magazine *Battle Cry*: "A psychiatrist in a Canadian court said that the violent fantasies in the game *Dungeons & Dragons* played a significant role in the conditioning of murder suspect Michael Leduc." Leduc was accused last month of bludgeoning to death Norma Kowhel and severely injuring her husband and daughter… "Through his massive involvement in *Dungeons & Dragons*, the boundary between fantasy and reality was weakened," Dr Stanley Semaru told a British Columbia Supreme Court jury. Having reviewed some *D&D* literature, Dr Semaru was 'horrified at the incredibly sadistic nature of the materials'. Apart from suggesting that if he thought *D&D* was 'incredibly sadistic' then perhaps Dr Semaru ought to get a little help himself, what are we to make of this? If legally qualified people are willing to testify that RPGs are potentially harmful, then doesn't it strengthen the case of organisations like BADD? The first thing to observe is that the law is not always fair, or even rational. Faced with defending a difficult case, lawyers can cling to any defence to mitigate the guilt of their client, including

This debate is not just about roleplaying games. Recently *Magic: The Gathering* has been banned in several US schools. Opponents of the game claim that its religious allusions violate the Constitutional separation of Church and State. Blimey.

Some game makers have made an effort to offend the religious right less. The fourth edition of *Magic: The Gathering* removed some cards – such as Demonic Attorney and Demonic Tutor – because of their names or artwork.

For more opinions on the matter of roleplaying and religion, this time from Christian roleplayer Andrew Rilstone, read his column on page 21.


Hi, Mrs. Anderson. Marcie wanted me to see her tonight.
I'm *glad* you're here, Debbie. Marcie has shut herself in her room and won't come out.
She hasn't been herself for weeks. I've been very worried. Ever since her character in the game got killed, it's as though a part of her died.
Maybe you can talk some sense into her.
NOOOOOO
No, Marcie! You didn't *have* to do that!

VAMPIRE™ THE ETERNAL STRUGGLE

Not just a game

You think all this hysteria is in the past? Check out this 'news' item broadcast on *The 700 Club* on February 12, 1996. The *700 Club* is a Christian television show hosted by high-profile evangelist Pat Robertson and former Miss America Terry Meeuwsen. It is part of the Christian Broadcasting Network and is shown on 275 television stations in America and 60 others worldwide. The following is excerpted from the full transcript, which can be found on the Internet at the CBN home page: http://www.cbn.org/cbn/news/newsindx.html

TERRY MEEUWSEN: It sounds farfetched, like something out of a horror movie. A self-proclaimed vampire seducing young girls into deviant sexual acts. But it's not a joke nor the product of someone's runaway imagination. In fact, a few weeks ago the arrest of just such a vampire shocked the Virginia Beach community. CBN News reporter Tod Freeman has the story. And we do want to strongly warn the parents in our audience that this report is by its very nature not suitable for children.

TOD FREEMAN: January 17 this year, John Christopher Bush is arrested in Virginia Beach, Virginia for sexually assaulting teenage girls. Using a fantasy game as a lure, the 26-year old Bush tells police that he's a vampire. Don Rimer is the detective on the case.

DETECTIVE DON RIMER (Virginia Beach Police Department): Mr. Bush, without hesitation, explained to us that he created a vampire family here. That he was given permission to create his own family and that there was nothing wrong with what he did, that he doesn't understand what our concern is to begin with.

FREEMAN: One of the tools Bush used was a fantasy game called *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle*. While games like these may stress a hands-off approach in the rules, many teenagers sadly found out too late Bush didn't play by the rules. If teenagers wanted to be part of Bush's family, they had to play by his rules. According to police, female members, most between 13 and 16, had to submit to deviant sexual contact with Bush, including breast biting, oral sex and intercourse.

Members of Bush's clan would cruise area malls looking for new recruits. Before his arrest last month, Bush's vampire family had as many as 40 members. Police say they were also recruited from area schools.

The link between roleplaying and fantas games – such as *The Eternal Struggle* – with crime is well-established. In March, 1991, 17-year old Shawn Novak murdered a nine and seven-year-old in cold blood. Novak was said to be fascinated with *Dungeons & Dragons*. And his attorneys said their client was possessed when he slit the boys' throats. Detectives say *The Eternal Struggle* has the potential of being even more dangerous than *Dungeons & Dragons*.

Pat Robertson

Terry Meeuwsen

RIMER: I do think it is more dangerous because they talk constantly about killing. Whereas in *Dungeons & Dragons,* while there is the element there, it's not always that. But here it seems to be constantly the quest for power and position.

[*Some material about Anne Rice and Christian CCG* Redemption *cut.*]

FREEMAN: What is the common thread, if any, that ties all of the teenagers together who played Bush's game? Detective Rimer thinks he knows.

RIMER: One of the common things we did see, however, is that there was a high percentage of children from fragmented homes, single-parent homes, and there was also a high percentage of the children who did not truly belong to anything or have any other what we call positive influence in their life.

FREEMAN: For many of the players of fantasy games like *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle*, the adventure ends when the game is over. But as Detective Rimer knows, that's not always the case.

RIMER: We have to look at the fact that we've identified somewhere in the neighbourhood of 40 children just in this one incident, and that causes us to take a real strong look at this kind of activity all across the nation. What we constantly caution the children about is: you're getting into a game here that you may not safely get out of.

FREEMAN: Tod Freeman, CBN News.

PAT ROBERTSON: It's an incredible aberration in our society but *Dungeons & Dragons*, which sent some people over the edge – some kids committed suicide – was a very dangerous thing. We warned about it a long time ago and were criticized roundly, and then all of a sudden it began to come out, the danger.

TERRY MEEUWSEN: You see it multiplying so incredibly. We got a family computer for Christmas and so we spent some time before the holiday in electronic stores looking at games that were available. I was so amazed at the number of 'dark games'. There were occult-type things. It really is incredible.

One man who campaigns for the recognition of roleplaying as a good thing is Jeff Freeman. His internet pages at http://www.chrysalis.org/jfreeman/RPG.htm contain lots of very interesting material about the issue.

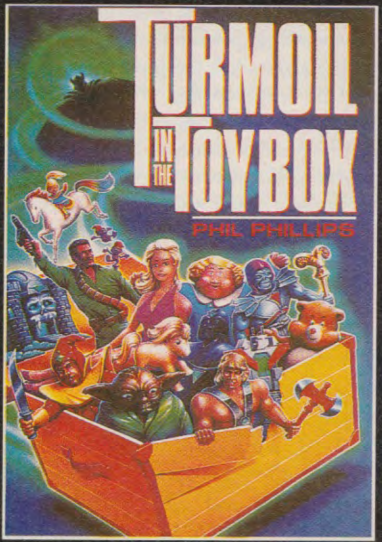
On February 16, 1995 the US Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals must have confused talk-show sensationalism with scientific inquiry when it upheld the lower court decision that an Oklahoma state prison warden was justified in banning roleplaying games on the basis that they 'encourage aggressive behaviour through roleplaying and the game characters may be used as tatoo [sic] patterns'. (source: Jeff Freeman)

The American Association of Suicidology; Centers for Disease Control and Health & Welfare (Canada) have conducted extensive investigations into teen suicide in general and found no link to *D&D*. Furthermore, Dr S Kenneth Schonbert of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York found not a single case (in a meticulous study of over 700 adolescent suicides) in which FRPG was a factor. (source: Jeff Freeman)

calling professional experts with fringe, or even dubious, backgrounds. Over recent years, desperate lawyers have resorted to defences that have hinged on their clients being addicted to fast food or even possessed by demons, all backed up by relevant 'experts'. When expert witnesses declare RPGs as the inspiration for crime, you have to wonder how they came to this conclusion, and whether it may not have been through exposure to propaganda issued by, BADD and their allies.

A reputable psychologist Armando Simon made a proper academic study on connections between RPGs and emotional instability in children for the *Psychology in the Schools* periodical. He came to the following conclusion: "Notwithstanding newspaper reports of fundamental religious parents denouncing on the one hand that *D&D* is Satanic and on the other hand, policemen and district attorneys blaming *D&D* for individual cases of runaways, suicides and various crimes, our findings show a more mundane picture. Increased exposure to *D&D* is not positively correlated with emotional instability. Indeed, as a group, *D&D* players obtain a healthy psychological profile, as measured by the 16PF [*a test of emotional stability*]. It appears, then, that in those cases wherein the individuals had previously played *D&D*, the game may have simply been an incidental, irrelevant aspect, rather than the aetiological factor."

"These are not well-balanced people, not just theologically but mentally"



The chief criticism levelled at *D&D* by its most tireless opponents is not rational but spiritual. According to one Reverend John Dekker: "Parents who allow their children to play with such games are opening their homes and children to the subtle introduction to the occult and malignant world of psychotherapy (mind alteration, values modification)". Kathy Dewey, a parent campaigning to have *D&D* banned from an American high school, put it more succinctly when she said the game 'is another of Satan's ploys to pollute and destroy our children's minds'.

The vast majority of the campaigning against RPGs has been by fundamentalist Christian organisations (though Pat Pulling, at one point, claimed to be Jewish). Fundamentalist churches and groups are vocal, energetic and firmly convinced that the Western world is infiltrated by a Satanic conspiracy. The existence of a large, secret organisation of baby-eating devil worshippers not only justifies the existence of the fundamentalists, but also their worst excesses of intolerance and bigotry.

Another feature of fundamentalist faith is literalism. They believe literally in everything put down in the Bible, a simplistic approach they are inclined to apply to the rest of the world. That *D&D* and other RPGs are only games, exercises in imagination, seems to be beyond their comprehension. Evangelist Phil Phillips, in his unintentionally hilarious exposé *Turmoil in the Toybox* notes breathlessly: "The word 'demon' appears 106 times in pages 16–19 of the *Monster Manual*," while, even more shockingly, "The word 'devil' appears 94 times and the word 'Hell' appears 25 times in pages 20–23 of the *Monster Manual*." Say, Phil, those weren't the sections on demons and devils, were they?

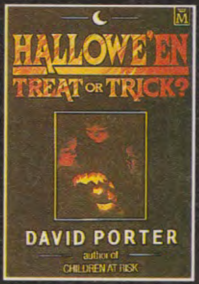
Pat Pulling spelled it out in a 1986 Occult Crime Seminar: "Where is the fantasy in this fantasy roleplaying game if all the characters, deities, gods, spells, incantations, skills and traditions are firmly embedded in actual occultism, demonology, sorcery, necromancy and magic? What *D&D* actually comprises is a crash course in sorcery which equips the avid player with the skills necessary to... perform Satanic rituals." So let's get this straight, Pat – orcs, elves and dragons actually exist, *D&D* spells really work, and all of this is leading us into the clutches of the guy with the fork and horns. And they say *D&D* players have trouble distinguishing between fantasy and reality.

Not all Christians oppose RPGs, and many are embarrassed or even actively angry at the fundamentalists' activities. Author and Christian Robert Gilbert made a study of the movement, resulting in the book, *Casting the First Stone*. When I spoke to him, his opinions on the fundamentalists and their campaign against RPGs were clear: "They're leading to more death and destruction of people's lives than the things they purport to oppose." But what's their motive for these attacks on a perfectly harmless hobby? "These people are so unsure of their faith that they will resort to attacking other people to shore up their own beliefs. These are not well-balanced people. The vast majority are unbalanced, not just theologically but mentally."

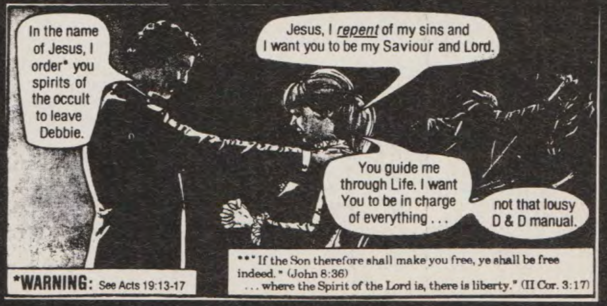
However, if the fundamentalists have convinced you and you're already stoking up the fire for your gaming equipment, then be warned. While Pat Pulling says that: "*D&D* deaths equal all other toy deaths combined", RPGs aren't the only seemingly innocent lures of Satan.

According to evangelist Phil Phillips, the Care Bears 'are in contradiction to God's teachings', Barbie Dolls 'pose a particular threat to young children' and the Smurfs are 'laden with the Occult'. Ohmigod! I think I'm becoming possessed by Grandpa Smurf!

The most famous case of '*D&D* murder' aired in the made-for-TV movie *Cruel Doubt*. Two teens supposedly juiced-up on LSD allegedly killed their purportedly abusive parents for a $2 million inheritance. A nonexistent 'game scenario' was blamed by the defence lawyers. Though the game scenario was never introduced in court, the jury didn't buy the '*D&D* defence' and no such scenario has ever been published anyway. (source: Jeff Freeman)



If you are a Christian and some of the issues raised here concern you we can recommend *Halloween: Treat or Trick* by David Porter. This book is available from all Christian bookstores and contains a well-balanced and thoughtful commentary on the possible dangers of roleplaying games.


In the name of Jesus, I order* you spirits of the occult to leave Debbie.
Jesus, I repent of my sins and I want you to be my Saviour and Lord.
You guide me through Life. I want You to be in charge of everything . . .
not that lousy D & D manual.
*WARNING: See Acts 19:13-17
**"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." (John 8:36)
. . . where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." (II Cor. 3:17)

LIVE AN

You've killed his character, and now y
*alter-ego. **Paul Pettengale** advises referees*

THROUGH THE EYES OF THE KILLED

The final blow has landed. Stiggorn Wulder, having long struggled against overwhelming hordes, has finally been overcome. All is lost, and despair pulls at your heart.

It's a scene just about every player is familiar with: the tragic death of a character they've spent months, possibly years developing. How could the referee have done such a thing? What are you to do now? Surely you can't start all over again, joining a long-standing campaign with a pitifully weak character that won't be taken even remotely seriously by the 13th level fighters and mages of the party? The game is up, and you're going to trudge home swearing that you'll never play with that bigoted sadist of a referee again!

The amount of emotional energy invested by a player in a roleplaying character has an inevitable consequence: that player becomes deeply attached to his alter-ego. When this link is suddenly broken, the effect on the player can be far more profound than the referee can expect – unless, of, course, it's happened to him too. The player will plead for the use of a resurrection spell or the employment of some new-found technology that will breathe life back into the object of their efforts. Upon refusal, they suffer anger and bereavement, taking it out on the referee and maybe even the other players.

A bad thing? Of course it is. We play for fun, not to replicate the feelings of anguish real life can inflict. And yet, if we're to roleplay well, a high degree of attachment to our characters is important. So how to deal with the death of your favourite character?

See it as a challenge: you've played this character to the best of your ability; she's taken on traits of your own while you've developed her – now develop a character even further removed from yourself; roleplay even better by adopting attitudes that are vastly different from the recently deceased. By setting yourself goals to achieve with the next character in what will likely be a long chain, you can get even more deeply involved in the game, and become a better roleplayer as a result.

There's a tendency to blame the referee when a character dies, though generally this blame is misplaced. A few referees deliberately kill off players for the sake of it, or even to develop plot hinges; but character death is usually brought about by the controlling player. Referees usually only kill when the character deserves to die, or, in rare cases, in defence of the scenario. When faced with a decision: to enter the spaceport bar where you know you're unwelcome and face the likelihood of a fight with 50 patrons, or to get off-planet and avoid combat, it's a foolhardy player who would chose the former option. If he dies as a result, the referee is hardly to blame.

Similarly, as was pointed out in a letter from Eyal Teler in **arcane** 5 (itself a response to the Heart of the Matter feature from issue 4), when players present deliberately obstructive arguments to the referee's NPCs, which results in the game grinding to a halt (a character refusing to rescue the princess because his wife might get jealous, for instance), then, yes – if all else fails – the referee may put that character to death, offering the player plenty of opportunity to escape his fate along the way. In this sense, the death of a character is being used to punish a player for making everyone else's lives a misery and ruining the game.

So, players, the next time your character is made suddenly aware of his mortality, don't throw down your dice in despair; don't hurl accusations at the referee or your fellow players who failed to give your character support when it was most needed. Accept the inevitable: we all die sometime, whether it's our own fault or not, and be thankful that when it comes to roleplaying games, resurrection is as easy as picking up a clean character sheet, a handful of dice and employing your imagination.

LET DIE

player sees you as the murderer of his d players alike on how to deal with death.

THROUGH THE EYES OF THE KILLER

The final blow has landed. Stiggorn Wulder, having long struggled against overwhelming hordes, has finally been overcome. Hardly surprising – the fool stumbled into the cave knowing he'd never get out again. If anyone ever did, he had it coming.

Character death can be and often is as difficult for the referee as for the player. Scenarios will have been written with the skills and abilities of specific party members in mind, or plot hinges may be based upon the personal background of a character, and so the death of that character could seriously screw up the rest of the scenario. More importantly, in killing a character the referee knows he's going to be incurring the wrath of the player. For this reason referees often shy away from killing off characters, even troublesome ones, preferring to give them some get-out clause, or to deliberately fudge a situation so that the they escape at the last minute. Referees suffer guilt when they take-out characters – guilt that is, for the most part, unfounded.

Character death should be a part of your campaign. For reasons I've already explored opposite, killing a character can initiate innovations and better roleplaying on the part of the player who's suffered at the cruel hand of fate (and, of course, your decision making). But there are other reasons why you should interject the occasional kill into your repertoire of refereeing skills…

If you never kill characters, your players are going to think they can get away with, ahem, murder. They'll become increasingly blasé about approaching potentially dangerous situations, and that ultimately means that any excitement to be gleaned from such situations will be lost. By killing their characters occasionally (generally, only when they deserve it through their own stupidity) you keep them guessing and, when necessary, make them fear for their characters' lives. This adds spice to a game and helps to generate an atmosphere of fear and nervous anticipation.

Also, character death can be used to keep your players in check – to teach them a lesson when they step way out of line. Often a player will try to dominate the action, or to force others to do his dirty work while he takes two-steps backwards away from danger. Although the player may be roleplaying well, this type of behaviour can ruin the game for the others, and as a referee you should ensure that this doesn't happen. Penalise the player by going after his character, rather than shouting him down directly, and, if necessary, use the ultimate weapon of death to maintain balance.

The frequency of character death varies depending upon the game system you're playing and your own style of gaming. I've refereed many a *Paranoia* session, and I don't think a ten-minute stretch went by without the summary execution of at least one of the party's clones. On the other hand, some games don't lend themselves to death at all – super hero games in particular. Here you've got to think of other ways of penalising the characters. Perhaps the loss of a vital power, or permanent incarceration should be turned to instead.

If referees can overcome the feelings of guilt associated with player character death and use it in their games more often, perhaps players will stop expecting their characters to last forever. As they are forced to play more varied characters they will gain more experience of roleplaying – there's more to be gained by playing lots of different characters than by playing the same one for years, after all.

Next time your players put themselves in a situation where the odds are stacked against them, give them a shock, and show them that, even in RPGs, no-one lives forever

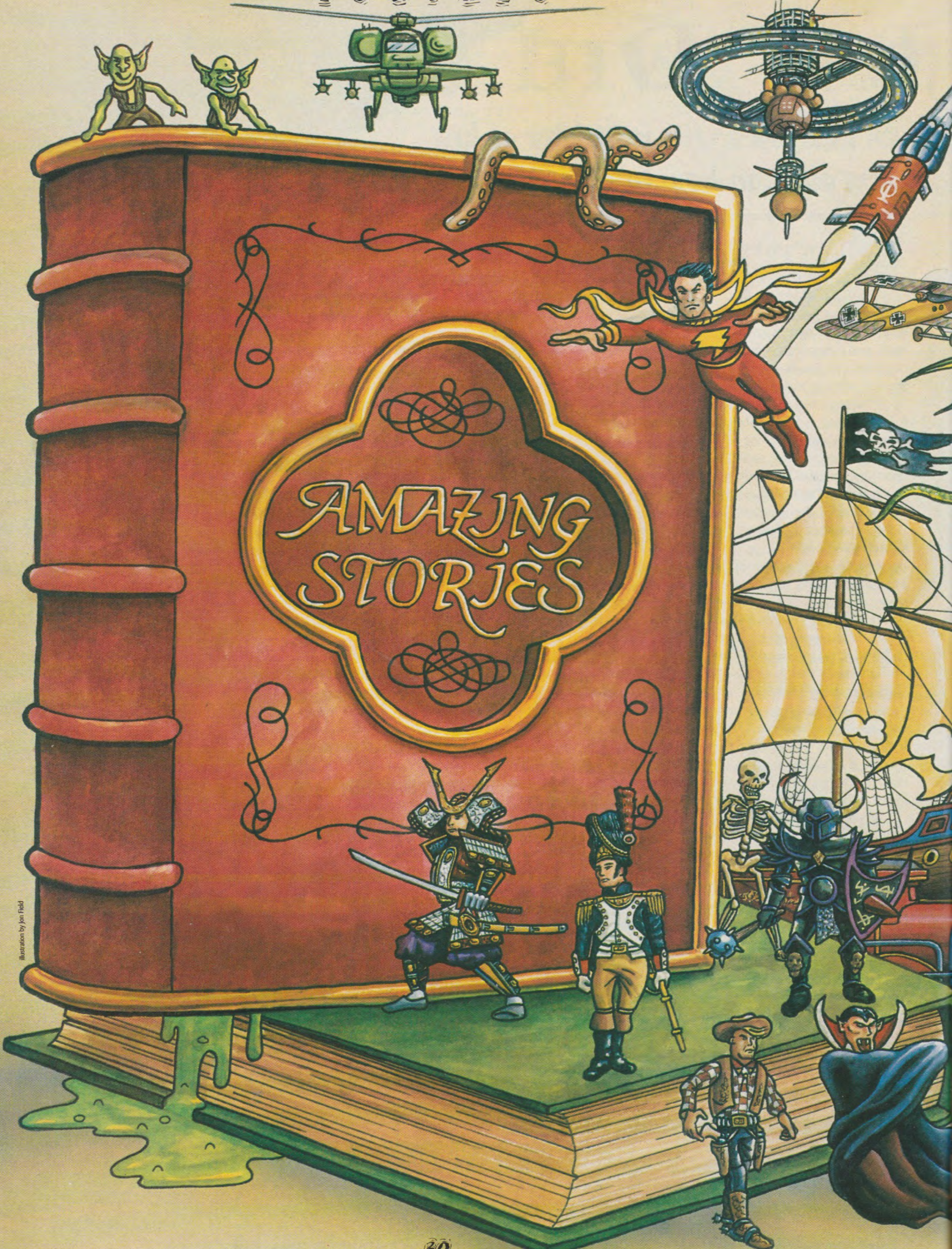

AMAZING
STORIES

Illustration by Jon Field

DO IT YOURSELF PART I:
WHY DESIGN YOUR OWN ROLEPLAYING GAME?

Frustrated by dumb RPG systems? Want to break the mould and play a game by your rules for once? Lee Brimmicombe-Wood points the way in the first installment of his handy-dandy four-part guide to designing your own roleplay system.

YOU'RE CREATIVE ENOUGH to design your own scenarios and campaigns. You've put together new creatures, spells and magic items for the system of your choice. You've even gone through and changed whole sections of your favourite RPG's rules so that they sit better with your style of play. So why not go the whole hog and create your own game from scratch? You've bought a dozen games, but can you really say that you've found your ideal system?

WE WILL STAND FOR IT NO MORE!

There are probably a lot of you out there who, like me, are dissatisfied with most of the systems on the store shelves. Maybe they're bad systems; either too complex, too simple, too narrow or too unwieldy to use. Maybe they don't do their job of modelling the background well enough. Maybe you think you can do better. And you probably can.

> "The best reason to design your own RPG is that you have a favourite world you want to play in"

The truth is that many of us still collect new games; chucking away our readies on glossy-looking product with ever-more outrageous claims plastered across the covers. We buy them because they're pretty, or because they've got an appealing campaign background, maybe because we're after new challenges, or, most likely, because we're too bloody lazy to develop an original idea of our own. What we fail to recognise is that by putting in some effort, we can not only create the ideal system for us, using the background material that we want to use, but we can also save ourself huge amounts of money in the long run (how many times have you bought a new source book, just because you feel you 'ought' to have it?)

There are a lot of good reasons why you might want to design your own roleplay game system, or adapt an existing one, rather than go out and buy something shiny and new. One of them might be that you want to publish your Big Idea, and make a few quid off it, in which case, the best of luck to you mate! However, this series of articles is aimed squarely at those of you who want to design systems for use in your own immediate roleplaying circle. By far the best of all reasons to design your own is that you have a favourite campaign world you want to play in – drawn from a book or TV show, or created out of whole cloth from your no-doubt highly vivid imagination. (For more, see **Sidebar 1.**)

① I'm sure many of us have designed systems to fit our favourite universes. For instance, I was running a *Star Wars* campaign long before West End's game appeared, while the *Empire of the Petal Throne* campaign I currently play in doesn't use the published system at all, but a tweaked variant of *GURPS*.

② Tailoring your game to your players is a vital element of any design. A fundamental principle of design is the 'Oliver Test', named after that heroic, bibulous figure, Oliver Reed. The Oliver Test measures whether a game mechanic will survive and not be ignored after the players have each had a couple of pints! If not, it should be ditched, or streamlined into something simpler.

③ Playing systemless games can give the referee an inordinate amount of power over where the game goes. Given the amount of internal politicking that goes on within roleplay groups, I'd only recommend systemless games for players who totally trust each other.

Designing your own game is a cheaper and more satisfying alternative to buying, though for legal reasons (and to make sure I don't end up with countless threats from US legal types popping through my letter box), I have to emphasise that it's only okay to design games based on trademarked or copyrighted material (movies, books, TV shows and the like) provided you do it for your own private use, and have no intention to publish it in any form (and that includes via the Internet!). But now that I've dispensed with that sagely advice, it can be said, in the best *Blue Peter* tradition, that all you need to design your game is a bit of time, imagination and plenty of effort.

At this point it's worth separating game systems from their backgrounds. For starters I'm assuming that anyone who wants to design a game system probably has a lot of the background detail worked out already. This is extremely important, because the system, unless you're trying to create mechanics that are truly generic, should be tailored to suit your campaign, rather than the other way around.

"When something technical needs sorting out... the system is there to work out success"

SEPARATING YOUR SYSTEM

This tailoring process works at many levels. For instance, we'd all agree that a campaign background with magic and psionics needs some sort of mechanics to handle these things – that's tailoring at the 'macro' level. However, a good design should go beyond simply including all the salient elements of the background. If you're designing a game based on, say, martial arts movies, you have to make some more fundamental and subtle decisions – for instance, do you have a complex, involved system that's able to model the nuances of many different martial arts styles, such as Hero Games' *Ninja Hero?* Or do you have a simpler, less differentiated system that's nevertheless smoother and faster to play, such as Panurgic Publishing's *Outlaws of the Water Margin?* Both are valid approaches to the problem based on the designer's vision and the approaches to the campaigns they had in mind. Your system should fit your campaign, your expectations of how it should play, and (not to be forgotten) your circle of players. After all, there's no point in creating a complex game system unless your players are prepared to play it. (See **Sidebar 2** for more on this.) These are all fundamental design decisions which we'll tackle further in next month's article.

SHOULD YOU GO SYSTEMLESS?

In separating out the game mechanics from their background, another even more fundamental question has to be addressed, which is why bother to have any game mechanics at all? This is a hard one, and there aren't any easy answers. Frequently, the question comes down to how appropriate it would be for your players to play without a system.

For a group of mature roleplayers, theoretically there is no problem with throwing away the mechanics entirely. You could simply define your character through play, or by use of a simple prose description in place of a character sheet. Diceless systems such as Phage Press's *Amber* game go part way down this path by enabling the referee to make the major decisions about the effects of a player's actions, instead of using the arbitrary device of dice or cards or other random event generators. Indeed, nearly all of us ditch the game mechanics to a greater or lesser extent. In talking about system design with other roleplayers one of the most frequent statements made to me is: "Oh, we hardly use the system at all these days. We mostly roleplay our situations and only use the dice only when it's absolutely necessary".

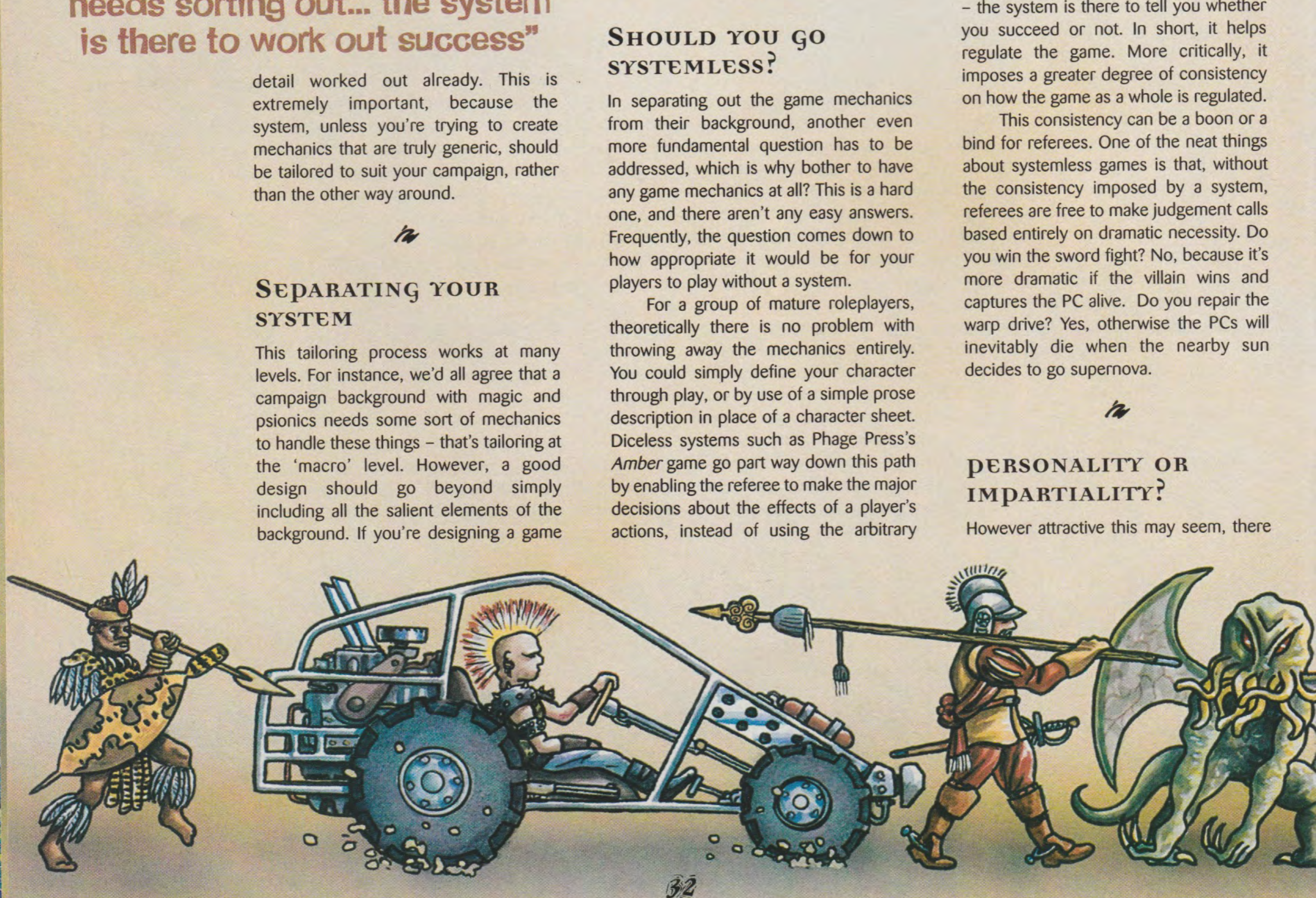
TRUST YOUR OWN JUDGEMENT

I like that term 'really necessary'. It defines one of the functions of a system, which is that it helps determine the results of key actions within the narrative of a roleplay game. Sorry to go all technical on you there, but it's an important point. When something critical needs to get done – winning a sword fight, picking a lock, fixing the warp drive – the system is there to tell you whether you succeed or not. In short, it helps regulate the game. More critically, it imposes a greater degree of consistency on how the game as a whole is regulated.

This consistency can be a boon or a bind for referees. One of the neat things about systemless games is that, without the consistency imposed by a system, referees are free to make judgement calls based entirely on dramatic necessity. Do you win the sword fight? No, because it's more dramatic if the villain wins and captures the PC alive. Do you repair the warp drive? Yes, otherwise the PCs will inevitably die when the nearby sun decides to go supernova.

PERSONALITY OR IMPARTIALITY?

However attractive this may seem, there



are some problems with this approach, some of which spill over into the discussion of 'dice versus diceless' games, which I'll cover in part 2. In short, without a system, control of a game can shift too much into the referee's hands. Whether this is desirable or not is, of course, up to the the members of the roleplay group. (See **Sidebar 3**.) Another feature of systemless games is the lack of a truly impartial arbiter; the personality of the referee very much influences the turn of events and, unless he or she is completely inhuman, is bound to be less than consistent. By contrast, systems that rely on random factors can be more fun simply because the roll of a die or the flick of a card can heighten the dramatic tension of a moment.

CHARACTER DEFINITION

One more point about systemless games that has to be considered is that of defining the character. A basic flaw of such games is that without the mechanics, there are no means to differentiate between the characters, which can become a problem if some point of comparison, such as who's the strongest or who's the better fighter, is required (as discussed in **Sidebar 4**). Another consideration is that of character creation. Some players can create characters fully-formed from their imagination, with their attributes, abilities, backgrounds and stuff fully defined. Others need a helping hand, or at least a kick-start in creating a character, and systemless games can leave them flailing for inspiration. One of the great features of systems is their mechanics for character creation. It can't be over-emphasised how important this is to many players in inspiring a character.

So you takes your choice. System or systemless? This series assumes you decide on a system.

Having decided to design a roleplaying game system, before you take Decision One on the design, it's worth understanding exactly what the objectives of a system are. Basically, game systems do three things:

Firstly, they provide a means to generate characters, to create a framework of values, ratings and/or descriptions upon which a player can base a character idea. This ensures consistency within the game.

"In short, without a system, control of a game shifts too far into the referee's hands"

Secondly, game systems provide a means to resolve conflict. This is not necessarily just combat, since it may include trials of skill or ability; or it may simply be comparing the effects of one thing (such as the strength of a character) against another (such as the resistance of a door, or whether a character can lift a stone of a given weight).

Thirdly, game systems provide a means to resolve tasks, whether that involves the application of a player character's skill, natural ability or a supernatural power.

TEST AND TEST AGAIN

A point worth remembering at this stage is that once you have all these elements of a game designed and in place, they have to be tested to destruction; especially if you intend to publish your game, or have other people run your system. You'll be surprised how even the most elegant design can be torn to shreds by a rules monster, or a voracious games group intent on getting the most out of your character creation system or game mechanics. The only really effective way to test a game is to play it, and be able to modify it often. The more players you get to test it with, the better – and remember to ask their opinions on how they rate your system. Creating your own game is hard work, but it's worth it in the end. Don't say I didn't warn you!

NEXT MONTH

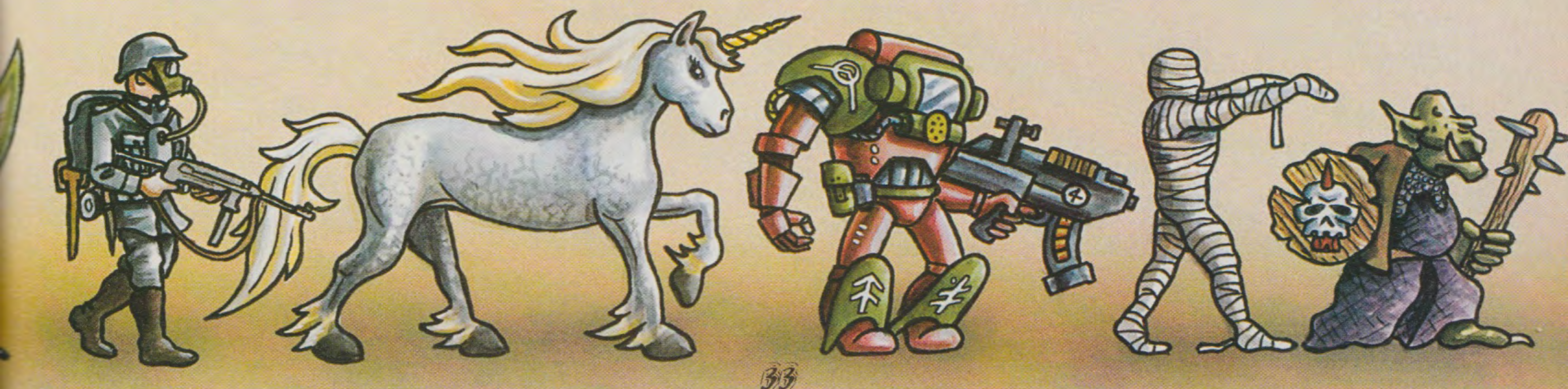
Next month, I'll begin to address the business of simulation and modelling, and outline some of the fundamental decisions you have to make before you can begin designing your game's system and mechanics.

generic RPG systems

So if you have a favourite background, why not just use a generic system to play a particular campaign? Well, at the risk of upsetting Steve Jackson Games, generic systems – like the jack-of-all-trades who is master of none – don't always model the important elements of a background very well. *GURPS*, for instance, is excellent at realistically representing man-to-man melee combat, and is a good choice for fantasy roleplaying; however, I personally find it too ponderous a system to use in, say, a Hong Kong martial arts style campaign, and too couched in realism to use as the basis of a superheroes game, despite there being rules available for this. There is a school of thought that believes systems should be tailored specifically to their background. This series of articles subscribes to that philosophy.

④ It always interested me that the first major diceless game, Amber, didn't entirely do away with mechanics for creating and defining characters. It's also notable that, in spite of the stripped down game system, there are plenty of rules lawyers (as evidenced by the *Amber* bulletin boards) who try their best to twist the rules to their advantage! Tyro game designers take note: Rules lawyers are your nemesis!

⑤ This series is not a by-the-numbers guide to creating a game design. Instead, in this and the following three parts, I'll examine some of the fundamental issues that have to be considered, and important questions that need to be asked, during the design of a roleplay game system.



STEAMPUNK

Imagine a world where the sun never set on the British Empire, a world where electricity was never invented.

Imagine Steampunk... **Cameron Winstanley.**

Imagine dashing down soot-encrusted back alleys surrounded by massive looming chimneys that blast cinders and ash into the air. Or cowering behind huge bails of cotton at the India Docks while gangs of paid cronies armed with coshes and auto-shotguns hunt you down. Imagine being aboard a massive ironclad fleetship that crashes through regular battleships as if they were toys, while overhead airships rain huge bombs.

A fantasy Victorian setting promises as much gloom as the most pessimistic of future visions. Many authors have extruded an unusual present from a Victorian era that never ended: a fusion of the old colonial world and a future dominated by steam-powered might, made grimy by a society bloated to the limits of its crude technology.

This isn't a set of campaign notes or comprehensive rules for a new game: it's a discussion to help you as a referee flesh out a lived-in, cohesive and credible Steampunk setting based on existing rule systems. The Victorian era marked the ascendancy of scientific rationality over religious dogma, and that's the basis of this fantasy world.

So, what are Victorian values? A corrupt ruling class propped up by uneducated disease-ridden workers? Repression of women to the twin goals of making lacy panels and having as many children as possible? Members of the working class dying before they're 45 and six year olds working in the mines?

The Victorian era was a bleak and by all accounts miserable time. Sure, rich people were very rich and ruled their estates like miniature kingdoms, but they still died painfully of lockjaw if they fell off their horses. The Industrial Revolution showed it was possible to cause long-lasting pollution without the aid of nuclear isotopes, and how to inflict this misery on workforces pulled in from villages and crammed into miserable terraced housing huddled about the sulphurous smoke stacks of factories.

Of course, the modern political goal of returning to 'Victorian values' refers to the other vision of Victorian Britain: we had an Empire, Britannia ruled the waves, and Johnny Foreigner was sent packing with a few plummy phrases and, failing that, a few dozen soldiers. Give 'em a taste of cold steel – they don't like it up 'em, and all that.

The south coast of England's a tremendous source of Victorian-era fortifications. Hurst Castle, between Southampton and Bournemouth, is an intact Victorian fort built to defend the Solent, and has some of the largest cannons you're ever likely to see.

> **"A future dominated by steam; a society bloated to the limits of its crude technology."**

A brooding Steampunk view of a might-have-been present offers an exciting setting not just because of the potential for odd technology, but because the Victorian era was a time when the established order was about to be swept away by technology. This makes it an ideal starting point for an alternative history. Join me now in a headlong rush through a century of made-up reality.

Isambard Kingdom Brunel was a hugely successful gentleman architect, and is a glowing role model for any budding Steampunk adventurer. His enormous paddlesteamer The Great Western was, perhaps, the crowning achievement of Steampunk era technology within the actual Victorian age. It's a shame it was so useless, though.

THE WORLD IN 1870

There's no need to construct your world from scratch. Films and books of the Victorian era abound, providing costumes, verbal mannerisms and endless atmospheric encounters for you to pilfer – and it'd be a poor referee who remained uninspired by a visit to The Manchester Museum of Technology or The Royal Albert.

The Victorians themselves had many ideas on what the future might hold; the era was dominated by the entrepreneur and the scientist. Many inventions appear so fantastic that all you have to do is increase their scale a bit to convince the players you're describing something entirely fictional, while others seem so fantastic as to appear made up anyway.

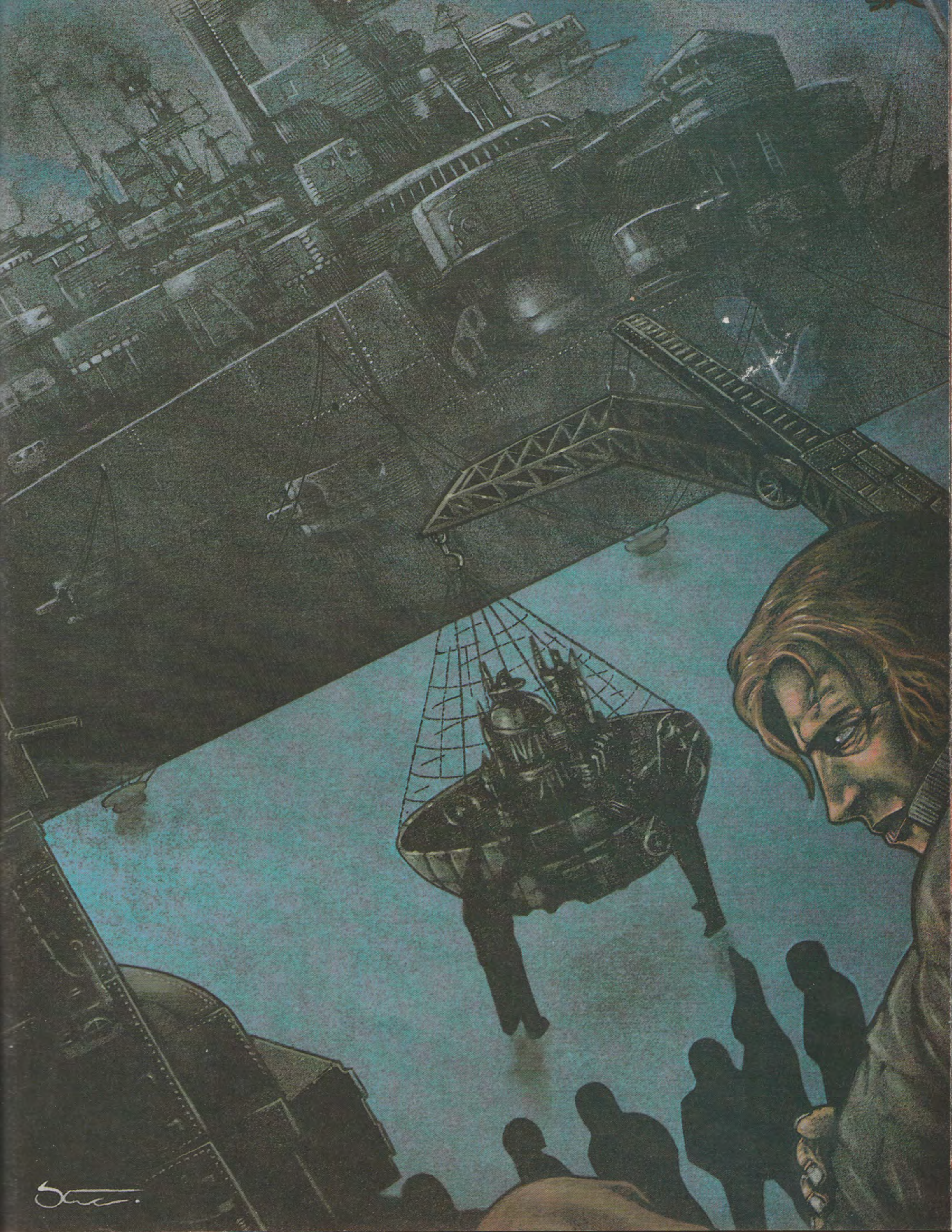
Here are some snapshots taken from around the year 1860. The date's pretty crucial here because many modern innovations occurred shortly afterwards, and so splitting the Steampunk setting away from reality at this point creates the oddest alternative present.

1841	*Hong Kong acquired by Britain.*
1851	*Great Exhibition held in Hyde Park.* *First submarine telegraph cable laid between Dover and Calais.*
1854	*Allied armies land at Crimea.* *Orange Free State set up.*
1861	*American Civil War starts.*
1865	*Lister introduces antiseptic surgery in Glasgow.*
1866	*Nobel invents dynamite.*

WARFARE

Countries were endlessly scrapping with each other in the 19th century and, with tiny European states like Serbia and Austria, there were plenty of enemies to choose from.

Battlefields of the mid 1800s were the ultimate expression of the old existing



side by side with the new. The slaughter of the trenches was still 50 years away: infantry still attacked in massed ranks and cavalry were still the shock troops but, at the same time, artillery was making a dramatic impact. Fortifications built in the era of cannons were low-profile and thick-walled to provide the smallest targets, and concrete was being used for the first time, making many look shockingly modern. Forts in the Crimea used massive muzzle-loading guns that fired non-explosive shells the size of dustbins. To provide cover for the loaders these guns were mounted on lifts so they could be loaded at ground level and 'popped up' over the battlements to fire.

Smaller incendiary balls were filled with molten lead seconds before being fired at ships. As a consequence, the ships got bigger. Composite hulls four or five feet thick weren't unusual, made up of sheets of iron sandwiched between hardwood planks.

Black powder was still the only propellant. Compared to modern alternatives, it is low-powered, slow-burning and very, very smoky. This low power led to the increase in shell size as the only way to attain devastating impact. Even so, the 'stand off' potential of modern-day warfare didn't exist. Taking an objective remained the job of foot soldiers and cavalry.

Infantry rifles fired huge balls (between .75 and 1 inches in diameter) that tended to smash bones rather than pass through the body, resulting in a high percentage of amputations.

SOCIETY

The Industrial Revolution marked the end of a predominantly rural Britain. Coal mines, factories and cotton mills required huge pools of cheap labour, and the countryside was emptied as workers were brought into the bulging towns and cities. Some profits went into building cramped housing around the factories, but most went into creating a new middle class of factory and pit owners. Removed from the toil of the working class, but not blessed by wealth, were the people of the lower-middle class – sufficiently educated to escape the pits, only to be locked into endless clerical and office jobs. Then there were the land-owning gentry, swanning around their estates, suppressing anyone they pleased and flogging poor people for fun or profit.

THE WORLD

After centuries of isolation the countries of the Far East were finally opening up to trade, revealing a regimented class structure that shocked even the Vics. Africa was divided up by Europe, who ruled it with a harsh, over-patronising touch and killed anyone who disagreed. Animals, minerals and the populace were treated as resources to be plundered. The Czar lived in his own little la-la land while Russia remained an underdeveloped peasant just waiting to rise up. Arabia consisted of a bunch of quarrelling, impoverished tribes. In America, the genocide of the indigenous races preceded the land rushes and territory grabbing as the West was won, while in India the Raj continued as it always had and presumably always would, stopping only for tea in the afternoon.

INVENTIONS

The Industrial Revolution was fuelled by the steam engine, and the steam engine was fuelled by coal. Steam engines, coal mines, railways and tunnels, the Suez and Panama canals were built. Huge iron bridges with shiny brass nameplates went up. It was the time of gentlemen architects with enormous beards and long names.

STEAMPUNK

CIRCA 1970

If your alternative history departs from reality around the year 1870, then none of the following key events would have taken place:

1875	*Nobel invents gelignite and smokeless propellents, heralding the era of high explosives and high-velocity weapons.*
1876	*Bell invents the telephone.*
1878	*Edison and Swan mass-produce the first successful electric light bulb.*
1881	*Pasteur demonstrates the effectiveness of inoculation against disease.*
1886	*Daimler produces the world's first motor car.*
1895	*Marconi succeeds in sending a message using wireless telegraphy.*

Any innovations in your world of the 1970s would come from the refinement of 1870s' technology. Many things would certainly be different, while others would stay just the same…

Simply attaching flowery-turn-of-the-century names to everyday people or places can go a huge way to conjuring up atmosphere. Pubs such as The Stoker and Boiler, The Harry Hun and (of course) The Queen Victoria can help produce that patriotic, xenophobic mood.

Injecting modern ideas into the Steampunk world can also add to the fantasy. Obviously you couldn't have a 24-hour garage or a Spar shop without it seeming incongruous, but how about Archibald Dukes' Open All Hours Apothecary to dispense soft drinks and medicinal goods?

If you're stuck for names, look around your food cupboard for ideas. A Huntley and Palmer Fleetfoot Repeating Rifle sounds better than a plain old machine gun, while Lee and Perring's Export and Importers has that definitive ring of colonial credibility.

THE WORLD

With America heralded as the land of opportunity, the internecine squabbles of Old Europe are starting to look decidedly grubby. Cracks in everyone's empires are starting to show after all this time, yet the traditions of small, powerful warring states in Europe remain. Cries for the unification of Germany have gone unheard, and even the Tsar retains a shaky hold over Russia, but only as a result of brutal suppression of the revolution. The maps from the previous century still hold, but there's growing panic that society is about to fall apart…

SOCIETY

Take the premise that the order of society hasn't changed since 1870 and you're well on the way to depicting the bleakness of life in Steampunk Britain. A three-tier class system with a permanent underclass supporting the upper two may have been something that just happened to work in the 1800s but, a century on, it will have to be maintained.

With power split between the Old Lords (the traditional upper classes) and the New (Champions of Industry), it's in the government's interest to keep things the way they are, leading to a strong polarization of opinion.

On the one side are the owners, who need an uneducated working class for the cheap running of their factories (until mechanisation makes the workers obsolete, that is). With the cities overpopulated and polluted, the owners have moved out to the countryside and are more interested in world events than those on their doorstep. The law protects their interests, so luddites are the only criminals publicly hanged, union leaders are portrayed as revolutionary agitators and censorship keeps the masses unaware of the world around them.

On the other side are the workers – not the one-time farm workers brought into the towns a century ago, but the children of their children. Although all they've ever known is poverty, there are enough educated, intelligent people among them who realise what a con the

Stu.

system is. These are hounded by the police as they struggle to make the masses aware. News of a more democratic way of doing things in America only adds further fuel to the fire.

And in the middle is the army – a huge standing force once used to conquer new empires, but increasingly used to prop up the dubious claims on these territories, and even to enforce order on the streets of Britain itself. Life in the army is one of the few escapes from the factory or pit, yet soldiers are now being used to put down protests by their own class.

WARFARE

With Europe still a mass of sovereign states, localised wars are likely to rumble on. It's possible that Gulf War-type scenarios based around coal regions might occur, but the usual 19th century reasons (border disputes, access to sea ports, good old long-standing feuds and so on) are just as likely to create short term, localised conflicts.

• SPEED OVER LAND

On rails, the stream-lined train is the fastest thing on the planet, but across country nothing in the Steampunk world beats the horse. Cavalry charges are a huge part of Steampunk battles, reinforcing much of the the pomp and ceremony of the old-order armies. Young boys still dream of growing up to be either cavalry soldiers or engine drivers.

• SPEED OVER WATER

Great Britain still rules the waves and has a huge fleet of varied warships. There's an obvious trade off between armour and speed. If it's fast it'll be fragile, but because of the need for an enormous boiler to provide a constant head of high-pressure steam, the fastest steam-powered ships are about the size of modern frigates. Smaller craft – coastal or inland waterway gunboats – are slow due to their small power plants or rely on other methods of propulsion, resulting in small, sleek, sail-powered clippers.

Infantry landing craft have to be both small and fast to land troops under fire. Keeping the power plant on the parent ship and blasting them towards the beach using a cable loop would work, but it would also require a drum fixed on the beach to run the cable through. The Steampunk solution? Send in deep-sea diving costumed sappers under the cover of water to place the drum.

• LONG GUNS

In sieges or close-quarters sea battles, a single well-placed shot can be more telling than barrages of random fire, so the best shot in each unit is promoted to the rank of Master Gunner and equipped with a long gun – a huge-calibre rifle with a six-foot barrel and massive telescopic sight. It's the Master Gunner's job to take out officers, powder stores and other key targets from anything up to two miles away, with the weight of each massive bullet providing a stable trajectory over such large distances.

• STORM TEAMS

Without effective armoured vehicles or pinpoint bombing, closing and taking objectives still involves close-quarters infantry combat. Black powder and automatic weapons don't mix – burning it produces so much clag that machine guns would very quickly jam up. To provide withering close-quarters fire, attacking troops are supported by Storm teams – two-man units lugging steam-driven Gattling guns. The gun man holds a multi-barrelled gun and ammunition supply, while the number two carries a backpack boiler that feeds the gun with a high-pressure steam supply to turn the barrels and operate the firing mechanism. Because it's steam-driven, jammed or misfired rounds are simply ejected, making it more reliable, and because of the high pressure jets moving the mechanism it can fire hundreds of rounds a minute. A hit on either man could be disastrous, so they're padded and armoured to protect themselves as much from the steam as incoming fire.

If in doubt, coke them out. The medical list of Victorians ran out after carbolic soap and opium poppies, but many an ailing Duke or flagging General was pepped up by something like Swanson Turners' Restorative Cure-All. More often than not, this was just ginger beer packed full of cocaine – very much The Real Thing.

Remember that the New World is just that – a fledgling country (or collection of independent states) where odd new notions such as equality and justice are the cornerstones of a New World Order. Yanks in Britain, therefore, are in for a pretty crass culture shock...

> "The colliers will be boiled like lobsters, but that's the price you pay for being poor."

ADAPTING TO YOUR SYSTEM

What system do you use? *Castle Falkenstein* is too fanciful for this bleak world. Let's look at what's needed:

- **Combat: clear rules on firearms and swordplay.**
- **Health: bullet wounds disable or kill. Recovery is slow and surgery difficult. Without immunisation, contagious diseases are rampant. Avoidance is the key to survival.**
- **Skills: horsemanship and mechanical expertise are paramount. Combat experience, languages and diplomacy will also be tested time and again.**

Obvious system choices are *GURPS*, the White Wolf *Storyteller* system, *Call of Cthulhu* and *Cyberpunk*. Or you could try making your own – see page 30 for details.

• FORTRESS RAIL CANNONS

Modifying the Victorian principle of pop-up cannons, Steampunk Vics have mounted the cannon beds on rails for movement inside forts. This way, they can be loaded and aimed behind the ramparts, then jacked up only for the moment they need to fire.

• LAND DESTROYERS

These are huge armoured trains running on special wide-gauge railways and fitted out with battleship guns. The sheer scale of these things and the weakness of their unprotected rails make them useless for offensive actions. Instead, they're used as border defences and general fist shaking, with their mobility offering at least a chance of survival from massed cannon fire. As with any machine running off pressurised steam, the chances are that the after-effects of bullet or shell damage will be more dangerous than the initial impact but, after over a century of working with steam, modern day engineers have ways of minimising this – vent hatches pop from the inside, releasing the escaping steam away from the majority of the inhabitants. Obviously, the colliers will be boiled like lobsters, but that's the price you pay for being poor and uneducated.

INVENTIONS

Let the imagination run free...

• ANALYTICAL ENGINES

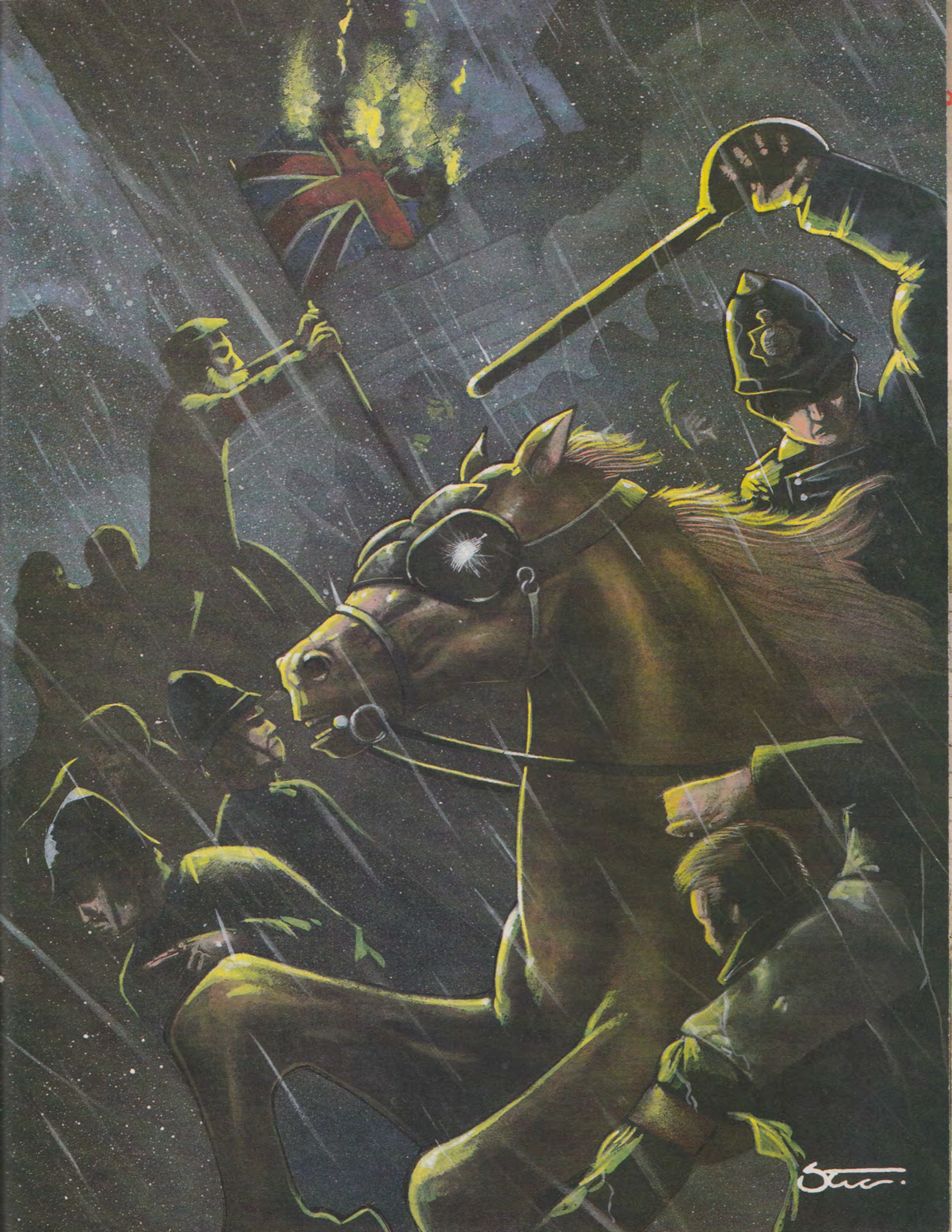
Mechanical computers developed in a history where the Information and Industrial Revolutions occurred simultaneously use cogs and gears instead of semiconductors, and are therefore huge (and very slow). The software medium is the punched card.

• AIRSHIPS

These use hydrogen, which is easier to produce in large volumes than inert gases such as helium. It's also incredibly combustible, making military use unlikely, and dogging civil ships with the threat of Hindenburg-type disasters.

• FIXED-WING PLANES

Powered flight is out due to the prohibitive weight of a steam engine, but why not leave the engine on the ground? Modern American aircraft carriers use steam-powered catapults to launch fighters, so how about a similar set-up to launch gliders? A catapult-launched glider route between Dover and Calais could be the



Steampunk equivalent of the Channel hydrofoil routes, while military versions equate with the V1 Doodlebugs.

• LIGHTWEIGHT ENGINES

Powered heavier-than-air flight would be the magic goal that spaceflight was to us in our post-war years. To reduce weight, a pressurised petrol system similar to that of modern camping stoves might be used to heat steam to drive a super-efficient turbine system. It's a small step to remove the water and power the turbine with burning petrol gases – it's possible that a primitive jet engine could be invented before the internal combustion engine.

TECHNOBABBLE

The credibility of your setting depends on whether you and your players believe the viability of the technology. Unless you're convinced that modern Victorians use steam because they think it's the best power source, not out of a sense of nostalgia, you might as well stick with the elves-and-moondust Steampunk setting of *Castle Falkenstein.*

Because of this, I think a pre-campaign discussion is essential. A smattering of scientific reason based on at least realistic-sounding premises makes everything seem more believable and goes a long way towards settling the players into their world. If ever your players propose a steam-powered heavier-than-air flying machine or a bipedal walking tank, it's better to give reasons why this isn't possible rather than just saying: "No." Magic, pixies, mind control and unexplained 'new' physical properties will go a long way to blowing the whole premise wide open.

For example, Thomas Edison first proposed a direct current electrical mains supply, even though DC doesn't travel well over distance. Tesla favoured the high-voltage alternating current supply in use today, but what if if financial backers had gone for the Edison system? Only large cities or maybe even large buildings would have electricity, generated on the premises or nearby.

It might seem inevitable that the internal combustion engine will have been invented, even in a Steampunk world, but would there be a use for it? For a Europe locked into a rigid class system and with a rail-based infrastructure, what would be the point of making cars available? There wouldn't be any decent roads. In America, on the other hand…

EFFICIENCY

Early 19th century steam engines operated at atmospheric pressure and were less than one percent thermally efficient – which is to say that 99 percent of the coal's potential energy was dissipated as either leaking steam or escaping heat. With the advent of slide valves such as those used in steam trains, the efficiency rose to around 8%, while the Parsons steam turbine introduced around the 1880s provided greater efficiency by super-heating the steam under pressure.

It's safe to say that by the Steampunk era steam technology will be incredibly efficient, making smaller and more powerful engines possible, and fuelling many of your more fantastic inventions. However…

IRON AND STEEL

The upper limit to a steam engine's efficiency, and the main factor behind the over-engineered, bolted-and-cross-braced look, is the widespread use of iron rather than steel. Although iron has a fantastic tensile strength (which is why the Victorians were the first to build suspension bridges), it's quite brittle and doesn't have the flexibility of steel, which is why swords are made from steel.

Also, it's practically impossible to machine iron, so everything must be cast. Steel is produced by burning off most of the carbon from iron, which requires Bessemer-type closed furnaces with air blasting through them. Real-life modern furnaces are, of course, highly efficient and electric or oil-fired…

source material

Here are some jolly good things to plunder ideas from:

The Difference Engine
a novel by Bruce Sterling and William Gibson

The Adventures of Luther Arkwright
a graphic novel by Bryan Talbot

Nemesis The Warlock Book Four
a graphic novel by Pat Mills

Warlords of the Air
a novel by Michael Moorcock

Zulu
stirring colonial bang shoot movie starring Micheal Caine.

Remember that it's steam and not coal that's the motivating force, so it's entirely probable that Americans would have ultra-lightweight power plants heated by pressurised petrol from Texas, while Siberian trains would be massive, lumbering, log-burning affairs.

Killing foreigners isn't just a part of the new Victorian's lifestyle, it's an ingrained part of their national identity. Any power that's subjugated half the world and then kept them subjugated for two centuries is bound to have the sort of human rights record that'd make hardened Amnesty representatives sob. Remember – whatever the Steampunk Brit doesn't understand, he'll blow away.

POWER-TO-WEIGHT RATIOS

To make a lot of steam you need a large boiler, gallons of water and tons of coal. A small boiler produces either a single blast of high-pressure or a continuous low-powered stream. So you'll never have a steam-powered aeroplane or jet pack – the weights are just too much. Similarly, car-sized personal transport is unworkable because the boiler would be too small to travel any distance. Lumbering, tracked armoured vehicles are a possibility, though.

ADVENTURES AND ADVENTURERS

So where do you want to take your characters? The possibilities are vast.

With a group of gentry, high-ranking military officers and New Lords of industry, you could set a campaign around a European or African tour, where the concerns are those of great statesmen and the adventures revolve around world-shattering events such as the starting and preventing of wars.

Easier to manage as a campaign would be a group of average Joes, be they workers, police or criminals. As police, they could form an undercover team sent into a city to infiltrate bolsheviks and revolutionaries, to close down illegal printing presses responsible for sedition, and to lock up or kill people who want to overthrow the state.

Or they could be caring union guys trying to get the best for their workers, to expose the inequalities of the system and find out more about the freedom offered in the new territories of America while they are hunted by the secret police – the same story, but from the other side.

Or how about a gang of soldiers trying to make the most of whatever crummy imperial outpost they're in? Or sailors aboard one of the massive floating cities that pass for dreadnaughts in this era? Or airmen eking out a dangerous living on the airships? Or businessmen confronted by some crank who proposes something new and revolutionary – ovens that cook using invisible rays, or spaceflight, or horseless carriages running on tarred roads at speeds faster than the fastest steam train? You know, bonkers stuff like that.

The sixth in a series of
collectable encounters
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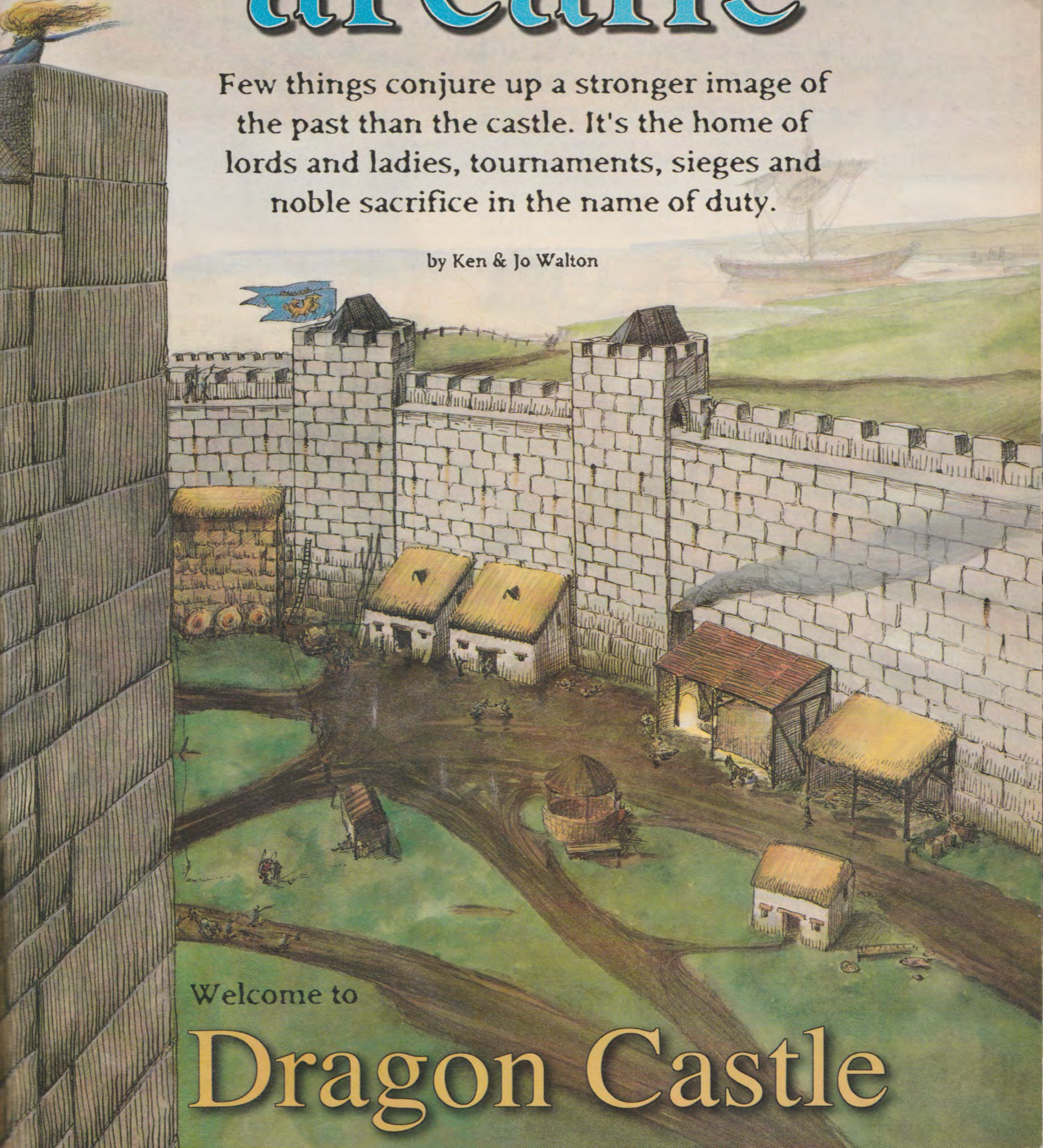
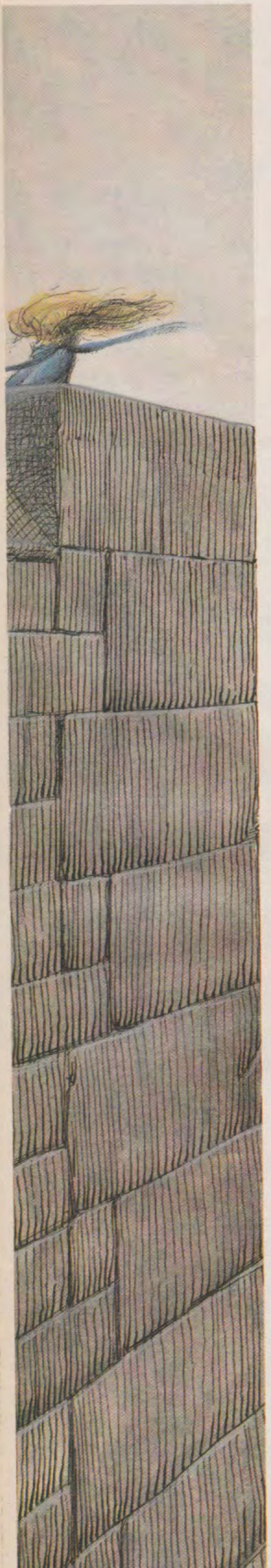
PULL OUT & KEEP ENCOUNTERS



Few things conjure up a stronger image of the past than the castle. It's the home of lords and ladies, tournaments, sieges and noble sacrifice in the name of duty.

by Ken & Jo Walton

Welcome to Dragon Castle



arcane *proudly presents another excellent 11-page scenario that you can use with any gaming system...*

Dragon Keep

Illustrations ©Simon Gurr & arcane

A bitter wind blew in from the sea. The little castle on the hill appeared safe and secure. Its drawbridge was down and the portcullis up. Guards waited on either side of the gate, ready to challenge any visitors. On the battlements the beautiful Lady Eleanor could be seen, her brightly coloured dress and scarf fluttering in the breeze.

Lord Henry, resplendent in his full armour, appeared at the gate and exchanged a few words with the guards. Then the guards bowed and he spurred his black horse on and rode off towards a ship at anchor in the bay. The device on his shield flashed as it caught the sun. "A golden dragon on blue," said Lady Arabella as she disembarked from the ship.

"If you are to learn the ways of this land you would say Draco or regardant on azure, I think," said her companion, Sulien. Unlike her sister, who was dressed in flowing and brilliantly coloured draperies, she wore mail and bore a shield, though it was without device. "But I think we will like it here. I believe that is our cousin riding out to greet us, and a golden dragon is his sign."

"As long as we are safe here," said Arabella, and a touch of apprehension could be heard in her voice.

A castle is a defensive fortification situated so as to command as much of the surrounding land as possible. The castle had its heyday in Europe from the Norman Conquest until the invention of cannons and gunpowder during the Renaissance. Before cannons made their strong walls useless, castles were considered almost impregnable, and their defenses were often bolstered with moats, portcullises, drawbridges and battlements. But castles were more than this. Castles were the homes of feudal lords and their families.

The castle is also the home of chivalry and romance. In legend, castles creep back earlier into history, to the time of Arthur and before. They insinuate themselves anachronistically. They know where they belong in a mythic sense.

Historically, castles were built in conquered territory from Ireland in the west to Russia in the east, from Scotland to the Middle East. Castles pop up in unexpected places. The Crusader castles in Greece are some of the best preserved and most fascinating examples in the world. Wherever they are found they carry echoes of glory and romance, of knights, honour, tournaments and cold betrayal.

There are innumerable ways of involving a castle in an adventure. Characters can visit one, they can build one, they can try to capture one – whether directly or by treachery – and they can even inherit one or be granted one as a reward for some deed. They might come to a castle seeking work, or seeking a place of refuge.

The castle detailed here is loosely based on a typical 12th-century Norman castle. It is not set in any particular

The System

You're a smart person, right? We don't need to patronise you with detailed rules on how to translate these people and events into your own system, do we? But just in case you're uncertain, here's a couple of tips. Whenever we do a character description (though there aren't too many in this scenario), we'll say something like 'Doctor Bloggs has a fine, incisive mind and this is complemented by a strong, athletic body. As a child, however, he suffered from a rare lung disorder that means he has difficulty in sustaining effort. He is also prone to making rather impulsive decisions.' In game terms this would mean that Doctor Bloggs has above-average strength, intelligence and dexterity and below-average constitution and wisdom. Exactly how much above and below average is up to you and the strength of your party of adventurers. This is also the case in systems that use levels. Give the encounter's characters the sort of levels that will make them a challenge for your players. You'll find similar descriptions of all important physical objects, such as 'the door is paper-thin' or 'this glass is bullet-proof'. Now stop reading this wibble and get stuck in.

period, however, rather in the imaginary period of the dream of the Mediaeval World. It should fit in easily on the edges of any fantasy kingdom – suitable for the borders of King Arthur's realm as well as that of Richard the Lionheart. Peasant's huts may be mundane and chilly, but a castle is for heroes.

Locations

The Exterior Fortifications

There is a curtain wall around the outside of the castle, serving as a first line of defence. In times of peace villagers and visitors can pass through to the interior with only the most cursory of challenges. In times of war the drawbridge will be raised and nobody will be allowed to pass through the outer gate into the barbican.

Even if enemy soldiers manage to take this gate, despite the boiling oil (or, more commonly, water), they must traverse the killing ground of the barbican to come face to face with another gate – and more boiling oil – before they can finally pass into the inner ward and attempt to breach the defences of the keep itself.

The Inner Ward

The inner ward is a scene of bustling activity. Knights practise jousting and archery, peasants care for the animals, and people are always coming and going.

The inner ward contains stables, a blacksmith, archery butts, lists for real and practice tournaments, granaries and stores. There is a barracks where most of the castle's soldiers sleep in times of peace – they will only crowd into the keep if there is war. The buildings in the inner ward are built of wood, not stone, and are not intended to be defensible.

The Keep

While it looks splendid from the outside, the keep's interior is cramped and draughty. It is also dark, since arrow-slit windows do not provide much light. The windows are completely unglazed and open to the elements.

The keep is designed for safety in times of war, not as comfortable living quarters. There is scant furniture. The lord has one large chair, while everyone else makes do with benches. Tables consist of boards that are laid across trestles and covered with splendid cloths. Everything is stored in chests when not in use.

The ground floor of the keep contains only kitchens, store rooms, servants' quarters and a dungeon. There are no entrances on the ground floor.

The only way into the keep is up the stairs, across the drawbridge and through the guard room. The guard room is always manned.

The well, which is the castle's internal water supply, is approached through the guard chamber, making it difficult for anyone to attempt to poison it. There is always a guard posted in the cubby overlooking the stair opposite the chapel.

The Hall

The Hall is where most of the daily life of the castle goes on. The stone walls of the hall are hung with splendid tapestries and with the trophy heads of game. There are sconces for torches, which are needed even in the daytime. Despite their efforts the hall remains very badly lit.

There is a raised dais at the end of the hall where the lord and lady and their most honoured guests sit to eat. Everyone else sits along the trestles that run lengthwise up the hall. Food is brought up the stairs from the kitchens. The troubadour sits on a stool and plays the harp or the lute to entertain the company.

When it is not time for a meal, the tables are cleared away and the hall is full of people. The nobles who live in the castle pass most of their time here. There is a huge fireplace, and the fire is always lit. The lord's hunting dogs sleep in front of it, and there are usually people warming themselves before it during the winter months. The inglenooks at the sides are the most comfortable places in the castle.

Once a month the lord holds court and the hall is open to any petitioners who come seeking justice.

The Lord's Chamber

The lord's chamber is the only private room in the castle that is heated. As well as being a bedroom it is the lord's private work quarters. It is here that he consults with his knights, his steward (who lives outside the castle) and with the cleric who deals with paperwork.

The Other Chambers

The other chambers on this floor are living quarters for the castle's knights and for guests. They are cramped and may be shared by as many as six people at a time. This is considered luxurious compared with the conditions in which the servants live on the windowless ground floor.

The Chapel

The chapel is in the castle's north-east tower and is easily reached from outside. Every day the lord's chaplain holds services here for both the inhabitants of the castle and the people who live nearby, who can reach the chapel without having to pass through the keep's innermost defences.

The chapel is very richly decorated, with gold ornaments and elaborate carvings. Nobody would dare incur divine wrath by attacking or looting it, even if the remainder of the castle were taken by force.

People

Lord Henry the Dragon

Lord Henry is the lord of Dragon Keep and the outlying villages and land. He has the hereditary rank of baron and, having spent some time at court, he is a knight in one of the Royal

Orders of Knighthood. He is 35 years old.

He is a very good fighter, especially on horseback. Although he has fought at his king's side against foreign enemies, he has never had to defend his own castle. He is very strong and knows how to use all honourable weapons. He is loyal but not very strong-willed. He has rugged good looks.

Lord Henry returned home to Dragon Keep somewhat reluctantly three years ago when he received news of his father's death. He knows that he is needed at home, and that that is where his duty lies, but he would far rather be winning fame and fortune at the king's side.

He is proud of his son little Henry, aged seven, and has already taught him to ride and to swing a wooden sword. If anyone asked him he would answer that he loves his wife, but no-one ever does, and it never occurs to him to tell anyone, least of all Lady Eleanor herself.

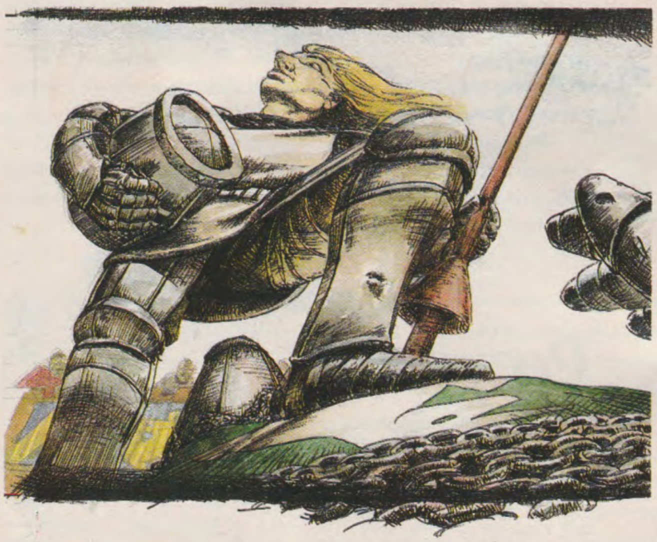
Quote: "Must say I miss having a joust now and then."

Lady Eleanor

Lady Eleanor is a count's daughter, and she sometimes needs to remind Henry that she took a step down when she married a mere baron. She met and married Henry in the days when he was at court. He installed her at Dragon Keep immediately, and visited her only occasionally before his father's death.

She is 26 and has been married for nine years. With her long golden hair, large blue eyes and fine features, Lady Eleanor is strikingly pretty. Unfortunately, her fine features are often marred by a petulant expression.

Lord Henry allows her to buy clothes in the most fashionable and splendid styles. She has two children – Little Henry, seven, and Belinda, four – but does not spend much time with them, preferring to leave them to their nurse. She likes to embroider, and sits sewing by the window of her tower. She also likes to flirt with the knights and very much enjoys Aneurin's songs about her beauty. She manages the affairs of the castle and holds the keys, yet she feels as if she is missing a lot of what makes life exciting, and loves to hear stories about adventure. She does not own and has never used any kind of weapon except an eating dagger.



Quotes: "I wish I could see something of the world," and, "Stuck here, as I am..."

Lady Arabella

Arabella is the youngest daughter of an earl in a nearby country. Her mother is the sister of Lord Henry's mother, and so Arabella and Henry are cousins. Before Arabella's recent arrival at the castle, they had rarely met.

Five years ago, when she was 17, Arabella ran away from home to marry a neighbouring lord. Her father cast her out for this, but her brother and sister stood by her. While the king was away at war, her husband became involved in a rebellion against her father, who was his feudal lord. Her husband was killed and his castle destroyed. Arabella hid, and asked her sister Sulien to help her to safety.

Arabella is dark-haired and dark-eyed, and extremely beautiful. She likes to wear fashionable and feminine clothes, but does not have a great deal with her. She has never used a sword, but she keeps a sharp dagger under her clothes for use in emergencies.

Quote: "I wish I could feel safe."

Sir Sulien

Very few women are ever knighted, even if they *are* earl's daughters. Learning to fight takes a long time, and most women prefer not to bother. Sulien, however, learned to fight as a child, sharing lessons with her twin brother Geoffrey. Disguised as a boy, she went with him to a tournament held at the royal court. She did so well there that the king knighted her even after she had revealed her true name and sex. Later she fought beside her brother and the king. Even after Geoffrey was killed in an heroic last stand she remained at the king's side, winning renown.

She and Geoffrey always adored their spoilt little sister Arabella. When Sulien heard about Arabella's troubles she immediately deserted and returned to help her. She means to install Arabella safely with Lord Henry, far from her father's reach, and then return to the king and ask his pardon.

Sulien almost always wears chain mail. She has long fair hair, which is usually concealed under a helmet. She looks much like Arabella except for her resolute expression and firm jaw. She can use all honourable weapons and excels with a long sword.

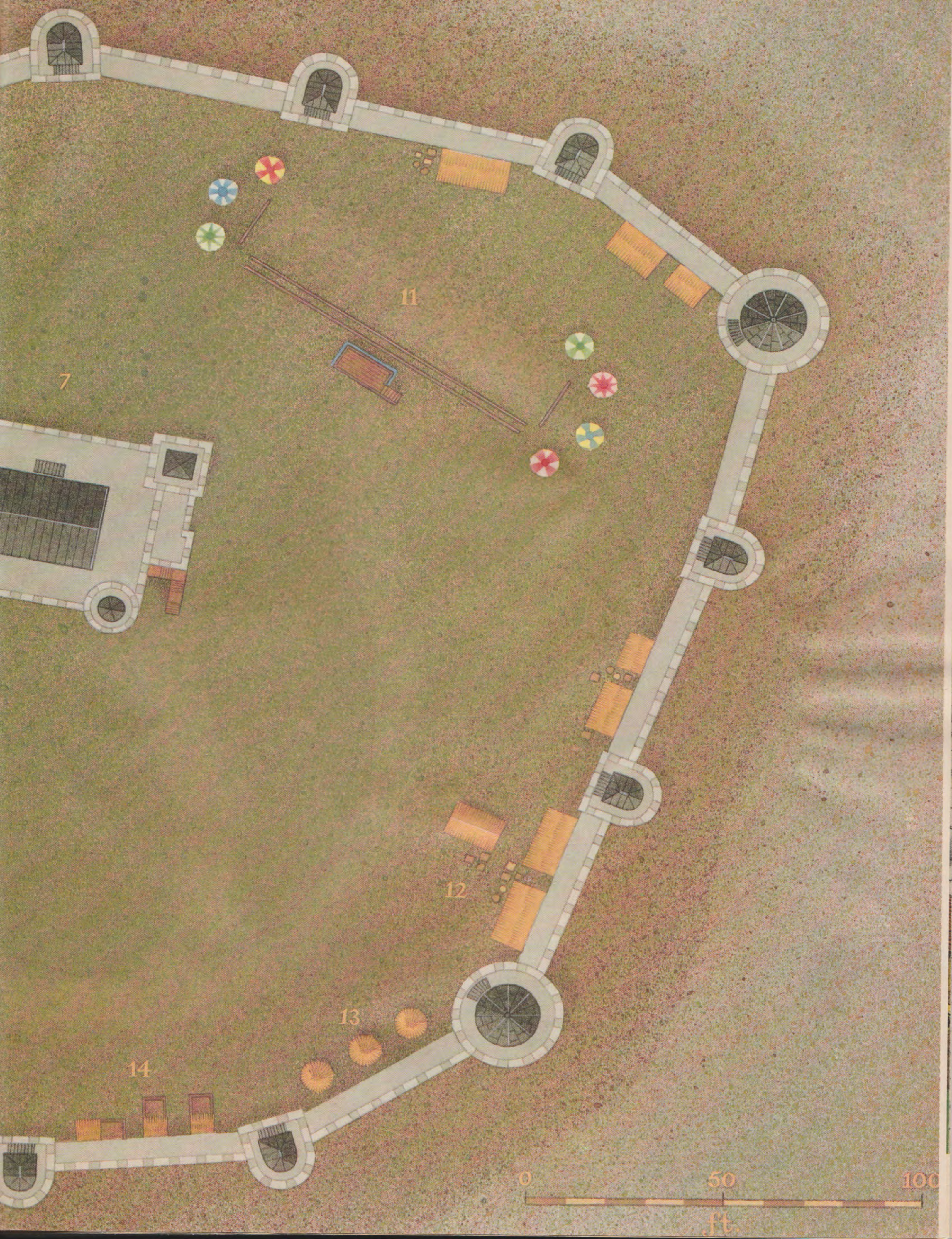
Sulien has resisted all offers of marriage, preferring a life of honour and excitement. She is 24.

Quote: "I looked him straight in the eye and then ran him through."

Sir Robert

Sir Robert is the eldest son of a marquis. He has spent time at the king's court, where he received a knighthood, and has come to Dragon Keep at Lord Henry's request. While he helps Henry he is learning how to run a castle for himself so that he will be able to take over from his father when the time comes.

Sir Robert is dashing and gallant. He is good with weapons, preferring a lance to a sword. He compliments all beautiful ladies, and flirts particularly with Lady Eleanor. He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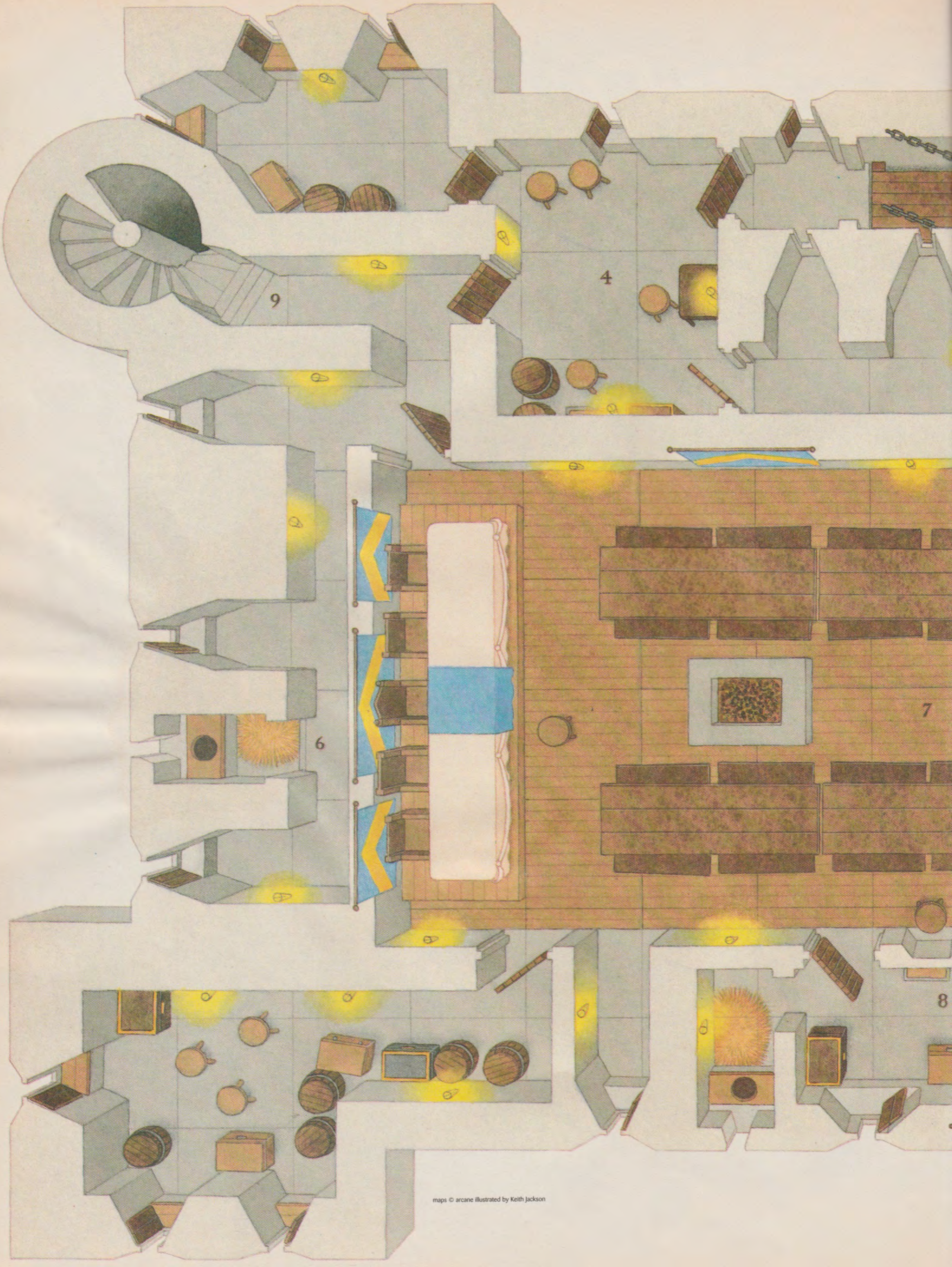

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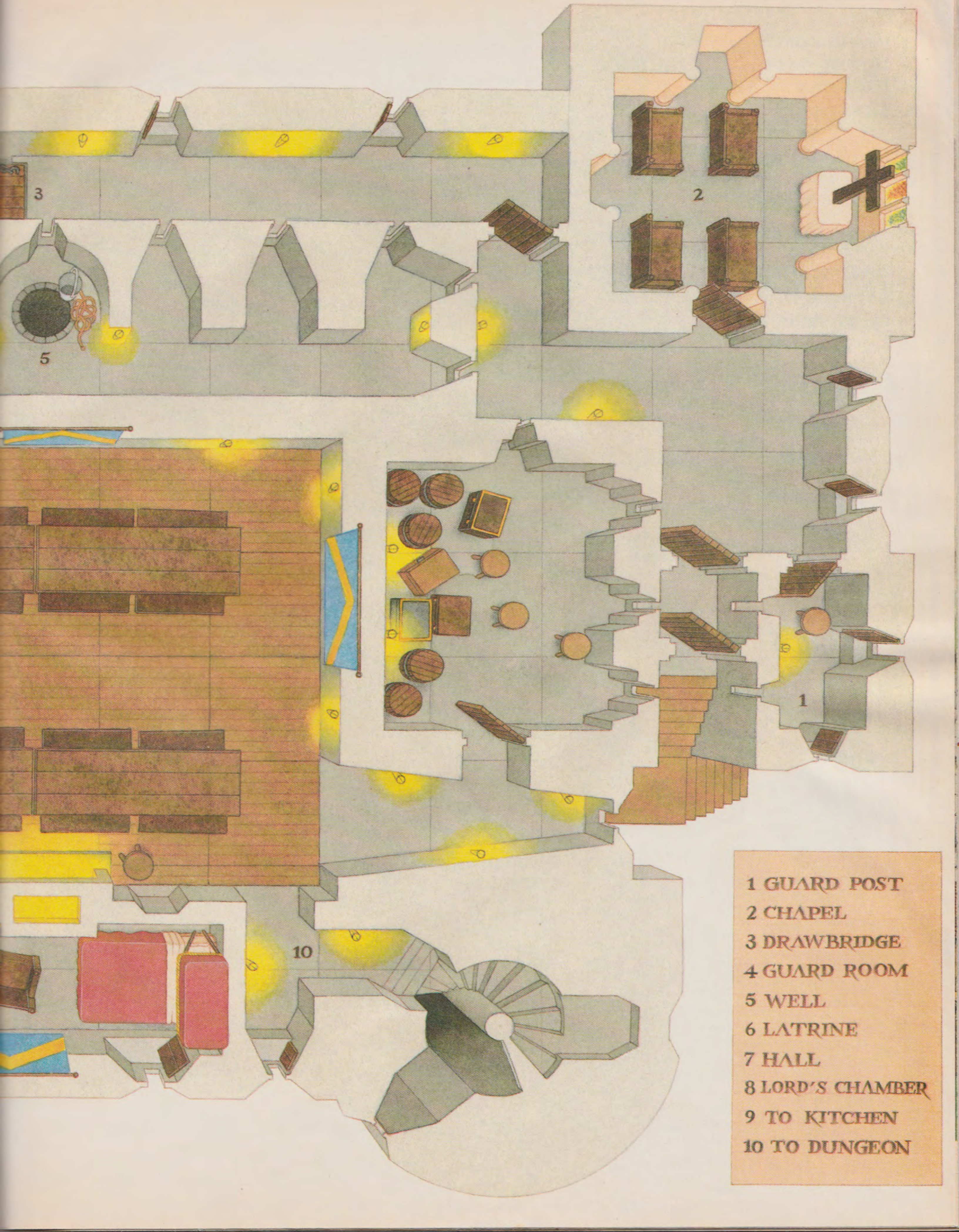
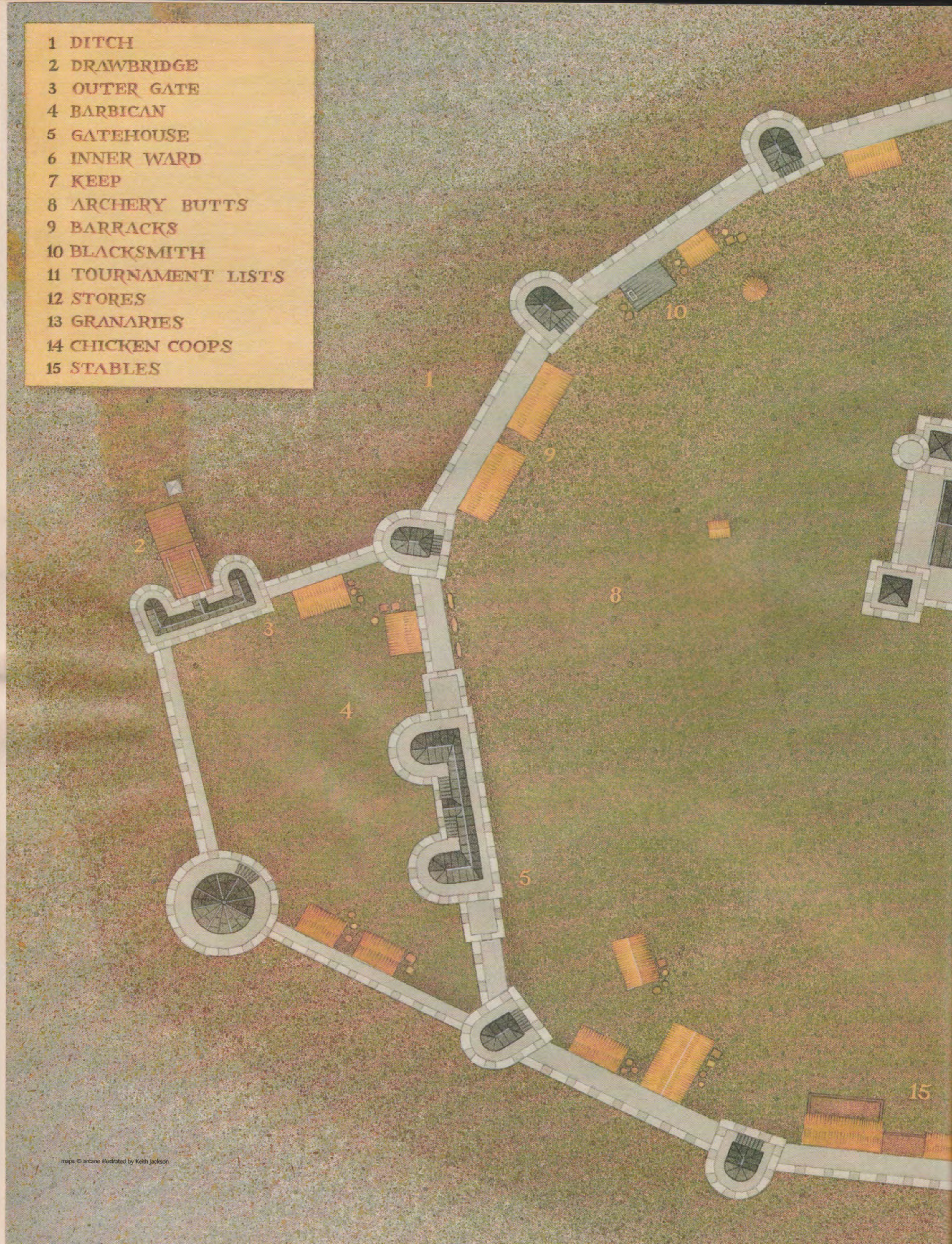


1 GUARD POST
2 CHAPEL
3 DRAWBRIDGE
4 GUARD ROOM
5 WELL
6 LATRINE
7 HALL
8 LORD'S CHAMBER
9 TO KITCHEN
10 TO DUNGEON


1 DITCH
2 DRAWBRIDGE
3 OUTER GATE
4 BARBICAN
5 GATEHOUSE
6 INNER WARD
7 KEEP
8 ARCHERY BUTTS
9 BARRACKS
10 BLACKSMITH
11 TOURNAMENT LISTS
12 STORES
13 GRANARIES
14 CHICKEN COOPS
15 STABLES
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is in charge of the other knights and guards of the castle and organises their duty times.

Quote: "I feel quite faint before your beauty."

Aneurin

Aneurin is a troubadour, a poet and singer who has been at Dragon Keep for six years. He is a favourite of Lady Eleanor because he sings beautiful love songs for her. Occasionally, Lord Henry asks for a more rousing tune, but he rarely gets his way.

Aneurin plays a lute and a mandolin. He has a very good low singing voice, and large, dark, soulful eyes. He claims to be able to perform magic, and will mix herbal healing potions. In magical worlds he might be a druid. He does not like Lord Henry or Sir Robert, and is quite in love with Lady Eleanor.

Quote: "Shall I sing another soothing song?"

Brother Martin

Brother Martin is a priest. He looks after the castle's small chapel and performs services there regularly. He also regards it as his duty to guard the spiritual health of the inhabitants of the castle.

He always wears a long brown cassock, and displays large and prominent religious symbols. He shaves the top of his head. He is 46 years old.

Brother Martin is exceptionally curious and always does his best to find out what is going on. He is much more loyal to the church organisation than to the castle. He and Sulien are the only people in the keep who can read. He keeps all the accounts for the castle and, in the role of clerk, deals with Lord Henry's correspondence.

Quote: "Are you at peace with God, my daughter?"

Emrys

Emrys is the cook, and the head of the castle's staff of 40 servants. He is 55 and has served at Dragon Castle for most of his life, since he began work as a scullion at the age of ten.

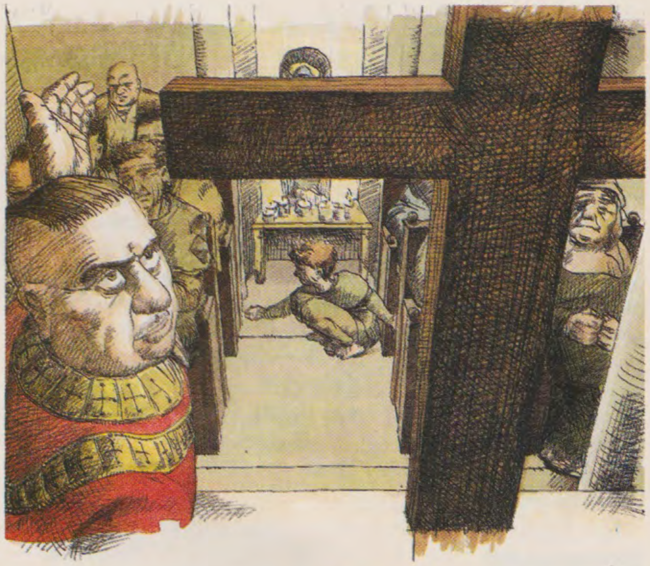
A man with a very loud voice, Emrys dominates all the servants, who are terrified of him. He also intimidates Lady Eleanor, and if they disagree he makes sure that he gets his own way by refusing to listen to her. He regards Lord Henry and Lady Eleanor as very much inferior to the old lord, Henry's father David. The only person he really likes is little Belinda. In the village he talks very rudely about the nobles.

Despite all this he regards himself as a loyal servant and would not betray the castle to enemies, no matter what he was promised. If anyone approached him for this purpose they would soon find themselves in the dungeons.

Quote: "Don't talk to me about nobles. Useless lot – waste of time if you ask me."

The Feudal Society

The feudal system is based on the idea that the king owns all land before God and makes grants of this land to his nobles, whose titles may or may not be hereditary. The nobles then make grants of their land to lesser nobles, and the process continues on down to the peasantry. The peasants are the most essential part of the system, because they produce the food that everyone eats, but they are considered to be the most worthless.



Titles vary from place to place, but are usually arranged in a strict hierarchy or order of precedence. A typical order might be: king and queen, princes and princesses, dukes, earls and counts, marquis and viscounts, barons, and then landed knights and unlanded knights. Knights are usually members of an Order of Chivalry. They do not inherit their titles but are granted them as a personal honour. It is possible to be a knight and in addition bear an hereditary title.

Most lords keep some fighting men around. Some of these may be commoners who can fight, or they may be knights or esquires – younger sons of noble families who have yet to inherit their titles and who have not been knighted.

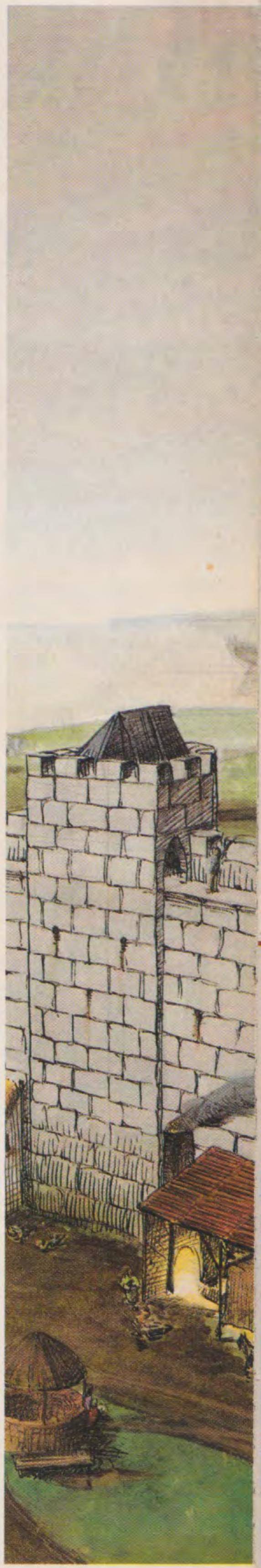
In a system like this, family is very important indeed. You may always turn to your family for aid. Equally, they may turn to you for help at any time.

Tournaments and Jousts

Tournaments are practice battles in which warriors can display their skills. Historically, the most famous tournament was that of the Field of the Cloth of Gold, held in France.

In any High Mediaeval kingdom there would be regular tournaments, which would include sword fighting, jousting with lances from horseback, and sometimes mock melees. These tournaments serve more than one purpose. They are entertainment, both for those who take part and those who watch, and they are also a chance for young fighters to show their prowess and win renown.

Usually the occasion of a tournament is announced well in advance and invitations are sent out over a wide area. Sometimes a tournament will be by invitation only, while others might be open to all comers. All entrants enter their name into the lists of combatants. (From this convention the term 'the lists' came to mean the ground on which a tournament is held.)



There is usually a prize, which might be valuable but may well be merely a token of valour.

Controlling the Land

In the Middle Ages a castle was considered able to control the surrounding land to within a radius of ten miles. This may seem small, but a warhorse carrying a knight in full mail and armour could not be expected to travel more than 20 miles in a day and be fit to fight at the end of it. Along particularly dangerous borders and in recently conquered country where the peasants were rebellious, you would expect to find castles spaced twenty miles or so apart.

Castles were always sited with a view to defensibility. They were often built in raised positions on hills, which has the advantages of both making attack more difficult and giving a commanding view of the land. Castles were often positioned to control a road and a river.

Heraldry

In the pre-literate mediaeval age people's memories were much better. Every knight and lord bore his own arms – a device on his shield that distinguished him from every other knight. In times of war the only way you could recognise friend from foe was by his device.

These devices are always described in a specialised vocabulary. The study of this vocabulary – heraldry – is very complex. At its simplest, a shield will bear a device in one colour placed on a background of another colour. The device, often the depiction of an animal, is described in specialised terms according to its posture. Here's a simplified look at the nomenclature:

Colours:

Argent: Silver
Or: Gold
Azure: Blue
Gules: Red
Vert: Green
Sable: Black
Purpure: Purple

Positions:

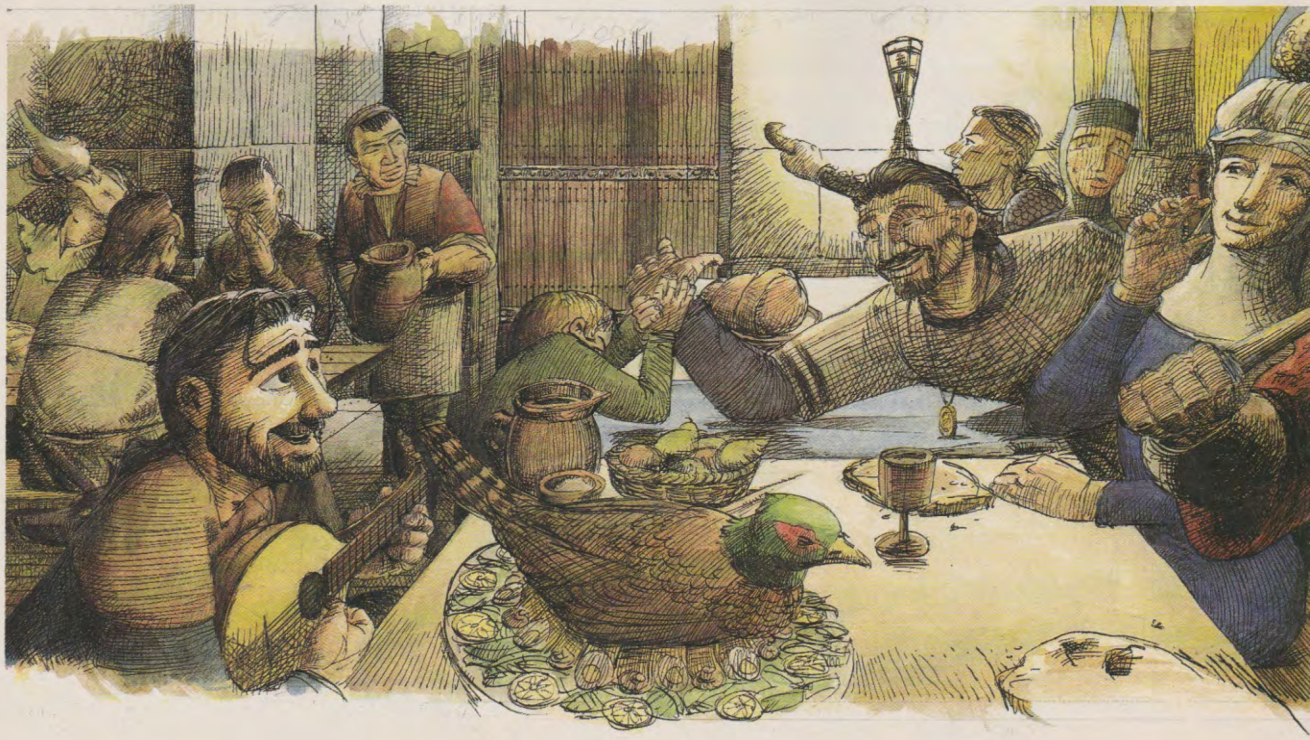
Standing up: Rampant
Sitting down: Sejant
Standing with one foot raised: Passant
Standing with head turned: Rampant Regardant
Lying down: Couchant
Standing looking ahead: Rampant Gardant

Armorial bearings on a shield may be split – for instance, in the case of the marriage of two great houses. Splitting a device once (two straight halves) is called Impalement, and split one into quarters is called quartering.

Typical heraldic beasts are the dragon, lion, griffin, unicorn and wyvern.

Courtly Love

Marriage in the mediaeval world was usually a matter of convenience, decided on by the couple's parents to forge an



alliance rather than for reasons of love.

Romantic love in the modern sense came to the fore in the mediaeval period, with the songs of troubadours and the immense popularity of the stories of King Arthur and of Tristan and Isolde. A knight would fall romantically in love with a lady – always a married lady or someone impossible to attain. He would write her love poems and wear her favour (a glove or a scarf pinned on his shoulder) at tournaments. The husbands of these ladies adored from a distance were happy with the whole thing. One of the forces behind the conventions of courtly love was the crowded conditions of castles, because a knight could not marry until he had his own land. It was encouraged and made popular in the 12th century by Queen Eleanor of Acquitaine.

Haunted Castle

In a game set in a later period – anything from the Renaissance up to the far future – Dragon Keep can be used as a ruin, although it may still be inhabited. In this case it will be patched up: the roof will leak and the electricity will cut off at awkward moments. It will inevitably be haunted.

For a subtle haunting, rather than one of the rattling chains and white sheet variety, use the characters described above as the ghosts. Emrys might haunt the kitchens, bellowing silently at unseen scullions. Lady Eleanor still paces petulantly back and forth along the battlements, waiting for excitement. Lord Henry might ride out again to look at his lands, or to meet his cousins from the ship. Best of all, if the castle has been betrayed from within the traitor might be doomed to repeat his actions for all time until he can find rest.

It can be very effective to play a game like the one suggested in the Tournament adventure seed below, and then later to play a different game with different characters and a present-day setting in which the new party resolves the unfinished story that ended in untimely death.

Adventure Seeds

Tournament

Sir Henry decides to hold a tournament while Sulien is at the castle. He sends out invitations to all and sundry – including the party. While the tournament is going on, or during the banquet that follows, there is an attack on the castle by the father of Arabella and Sulien. This could be a direct attack or, more subtly, a betrayal. Eleanor, jealous of the attention Arabella is attracting, could open the gates to the attackers, believing their promises that they will protect her and her children. Or Brother Martin could betray them all. There are many possibilities for betrayal and the conflict that must inevitably follow.

Sulien's Band

The party are Sulien's band, the warriors who always fight with her. When she deserts to help her sister, they naturally accompany her. This is a good way of getting a party inside the castle and embroiled in the evolving conflicts between the characters. It's also a good way of introducing the mediaeval conventions to the players. Sulien's band need not all be from Lord Henry's culture – Sulien and Arabella's culture is itself subtly different. The party can encounter the culture of his world one piece at a time and have things explained to them on a 'need-to-know' basis.

Siege

The party are inside the castle when ships show up to besiege them. The internal situation worsens, and it is not possible to escape. A small party might have a chance to break through the lines and get a message to the king in time to save everyone. Betrayals are also possible here: wells could be poisoned, gates opened and guards bribed.

Questing

In a period of chivalry and high romance, knights go out questing for magical or unusual things. Knights on a quest are entitled to hospitality wherever they go, and this can be a good way of getting people inside a castle. Suitable aims for a quest include (but are not limited to): the Holy Grail, the Questing Beast, a milk-white hind, and one's true love.

The Border Lord

Arabella thinks her husband is dead, but she didn't see his body. He may have escaped and be seeking her. He may gather up a few trusty PC companions and come to the castle in disguise, suspecting she is there. If he sees her flirting with one of the knights there could be blood.

Next month

Slammer, chokey, the nick – doing bird, porridge or time, Whatever you call it and no matter how you look at it, life in prison is decidedly unpleasant – not to say inevitable for most player characters at some time in their gaming career. Next month we proudly present – crikey, you've already worked it out haven't you – The Prison.

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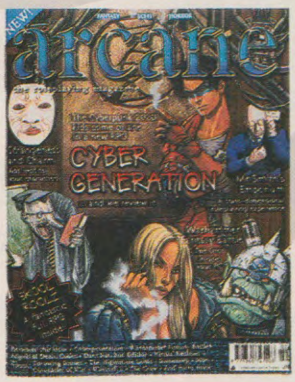
Issue 2 explored *AD&D: Skills & Powers,* previewed 1996's big releases, interviewed Richard Garfield (*Magic*'s inventor) and starred The Golden Dragon Inn, a 16-page Encounters special.



Issue 3 had a complete, free RPG called *Skool Roolz,* reviewed *Cybergeneration* and *Warhammer Fantasy Battle CD-ROM,* had a feature on making your characters more quirky and featured Mr Smith's trans-dimensional Emporium as our Encounter.

Issue 4 explained roleplaying for beginners, discussed the role of acting in gaming, reviewed *MIddle Earth: The Wizards, Legend of the Five Rings* and *Night Below,* while Stormburg, the flying extra-planar city materialised in the Encounters section.

Issue 5 had Richard Garfield's thoughts on *Netrunner,* advice on wars, a feature on the roleplaying scene in Japan and reviewed *Vampire: The Dark Ages, Don't Look Back, Mage: The Ascension* and *Heresy* as well as having The Train pull into the Encounters section.

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- You receive a full game map every turn showing the forces of all the players and on most turns you will fight multiple battles.

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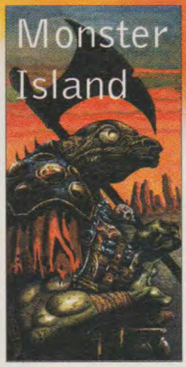

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THE MONTH IN GAMES

Better than *Magic*? They must be mad...

WELL, WE'RE CERTAINLY very impressed with *Netrunner* – have a look and see what we've got to say just over the page. Other highlights this month include the wonderfully funny *GURPS Goblins, Mystic Secrets* for *Earthdawn* and the brand new edition of the perennially popular *Space Hulk* from Games Workshop. Plus we've got the usual huge array of material for all the major genres.

Our policy is to review honestly, fairly and incisively all the major roleplaying, CCG and related game releases. If it's praised in **arcane** you know you can buy it with confidence; if we slate it, well... it's your money.

All our reviews are by experienced gamers and independent, professional journalists; people who play the games you do. This definitely is *the* place for definitive reviews of games and expansions.

(And while you're here, a note about prices. A lot of stuff reviewed in **arcane** is imported from the USA by a number of different distributors, so the prices we've given must be viewed as guidelines only. Trade wars or something...)

Pick of the month

"Each side presents unique challenges"

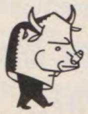
Netrunner
Page 56

"A wealth of wonderful background"

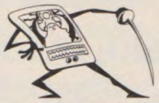
GURPS Goblins
Page 60

The Icons

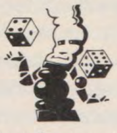
Each review in **arcane** is identified with a rather nifty icon showing what kind of game it is. Here's what they mean:



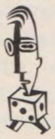
Roleplaying systems



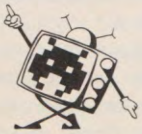
Collectable card games and expansions



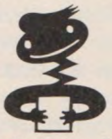
Board games, miniature systems



Dice games and expansions



Computer games and utilities



Books and supplements

The Scores

Everything reviewed in **arcane** gets a mark out of 10. Here's a guide to what the individual marks represent...

Score 10/10	Perfect. There's simply nothing better.
Score 9/10	Excellent; a classic. Highly recommended.
Score 8/10	Very good, with few problems. Recommended.
Score 7/10	Good, but not exceptional.
Score 6/10	Above average, but not without problems.
Score 5/10	Average, or a mixture of good and bad.
Score 4/10	Below average, but not without merit.
Score 3/10	Poor, crucially flawed in some way.
Score 2/10	Very poor; should be avoided.
Score 1/10	Appallingly bad, no redeeming features at all.

arcane seal of approval

Each month we fight and argue among ourselves to select that one extra-special product most deserving of your money and the coveted **arcane** accolade.

arcane
SEAL OF
APPROVAL

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To all the superb goodies we've got for you this month...

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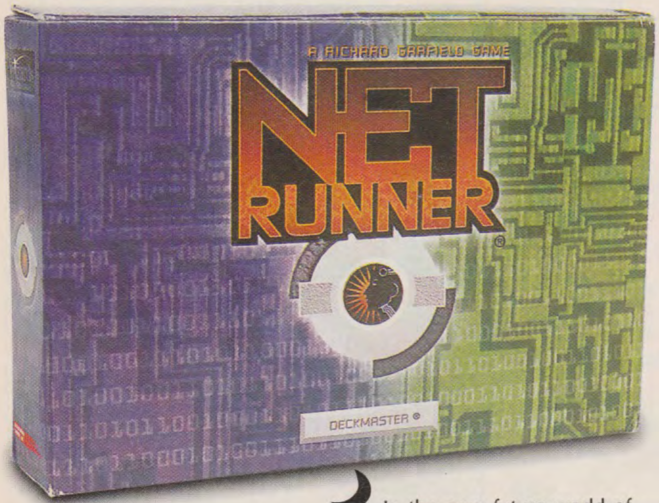
Netrunner

A collectable card game

Double-deck starter £13.50

15 card Booster £2.20 **Wizards Of The Coast** **0345 125599** **Out now**


A RICHARD GARFIELD GAME
NET RUNNER
DECKMASTER

we've been playing it all month, we've called it better than Magic. Here's why...

In the near-future world of R Talsorian's Cyberpunk 2020 roleplaying system, governments have collapsed and vast megacorporations have risen to power. Ruling the world from the plush offices of their high-rise towers and dominating the global communications network with their impregnable Data Forts, the corporations have only one real enemy – the runners. Outlaws, rebels and mercenaries, these hardened street warriors are dedicated to seeing the corporations fall.

Cyberpunk is a style of near-future science fiction that became popular in the '80s. The most famous example is Neuromancer, by William Gibson.

Perhaps the most dangerous of them, from the corps' point of view, are the netrunners. These futuristic hackers use a combination of cutting edge technology, innate talent, and illegal programs to break into the corporations' computers, stealing valuable data and using it for their own purposes.

Netrunner, the latest collectable card game from Richard Garfield and Wizards Of The Coast, is set in this dark and violent world. One player takes on the role of the Corporation and seeks to carry out specific business plans called Agendas, whilst the other plays the Runner and attempts to thwart the Corporation by stealing information vital to the completion of these varied plans.

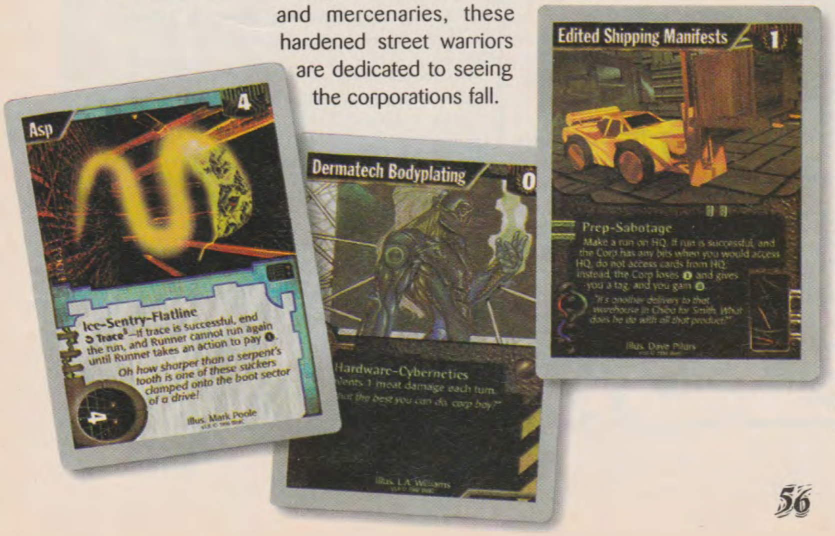
"The corporation's aim is to carry out business by scoring Agenda points"

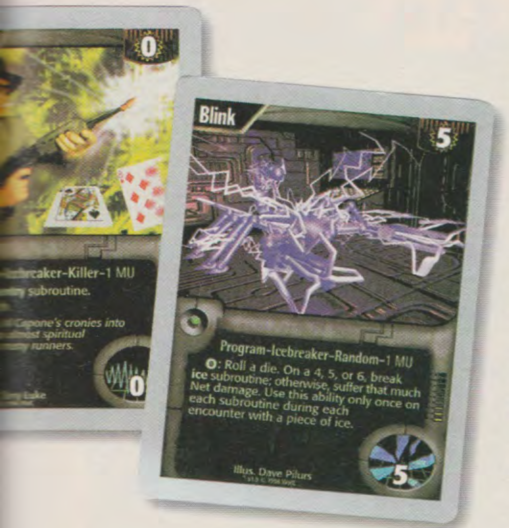
Obviously, these are very different roles, and as such each player uses a different set of cards, one for the Runner and one for the Corporation. Although this in itself is not unique – Decipher's *Star Wars* (reviewed in **arcane** 5), for example, also uses two sets, one for the Light side of the Force, the other for the Dark side – what makes *Netrunner* unlike every other card game currently available is that the two sides also play very differently, and each has its own set of rules.

THE CORRIDORS OF POWER

The Corporation uses five types of card - Agenda, Node, Upgrade, Ice and Operation. Agenda cards represent the data associated with the Corporation's secret plans and objectives. Each is worth a certain number of Agenda points, and has a difficulty value. Many also grant the Corporation a special bonus if they are 'scored'. Nodes are computer resources dedicated to supporting less essential projects, such as advertising campaigns and subsidiary business interests. Upgrades allow the Corp to improve a specific area of its computer defences. Ice cards represent Intrusion Countermeasure Electronics – programs that the Corporation uses to protect its data from the Runner. Finally, Operations are specific, 'one shot' actions that the Corporation can perform.

The Corporation's aim is to carry out its business plans by scoring Agenda cards. If the Corporation player scores Agenda cards worth a total of seven Agenda points, they win the game. The Corp also wins if it flatlines (kills) the


Asp
4
Ice-Sentry-Flatline
Trace⁵–If trace is successful, end the run, and Runner cannot run again until Runner takes an action to pay
Oh how sharper than a serpent's tooth is one of these suckers clamped onto the boot sector of a drive!
4
Illus. Mark Poole
Dermatech Bodyplating
0
Hardware-Cybernetics
Illus. L.A. Williams
Edited Shipping Manifests
1
Prep-Sabotage
Make a run on HQ. If run is successful and the Corp has any bits when you would access HQ, do not access cards from HQ. Instead, the Corp loses and gives you a tag, and you gain
"It's another delivery to that warehouse in Chiba for Smith. What does he do with all that product?"
Illus. Dave Pilurs



Runner player by forcing them to discard more cards than they have in their hand.

To complete its objectives, the Corp plays cards to build and protect Data Fortresses – locations representing its computers in the virtual reality of the global communications network, or Netspace. The Corporation begins the game with three Central Data Forts, representing its Archives (discard pile), Research & Development (draw pile) and Headquarters (cards in hand). Each Node and Agenda card is played in its own Subsidiary Data Fort, alongside the others. Each Data Fort can also have Upgrade cards played on it, and be defended by Ice cards. (See 'Virtually secure?' for an example.)

Out On The Streets

The Runner player, on the other hand, uses four types of cards – Program, Hardware, Resource, and Prep. Program cards represent the illegal, well, programs that the Runner uses in Netspace, and come in three main types. Icebreakers are used to defeat corporate Ice programs, Viruses leave little 'surprises' in the Corporation's system, while Utilities perform a variety of miscellaneous functions. Hardware cards are bits and pieces of equipment that the Runner uses, both in Netspace and the real world, such as vehicles and special chips that increase the power of their computers. Resource cards symbolise the contacts, friends and organisations that the Runner can call on. Finally, Prep cards, like corporate Operations, are one-off actions that the Runner can perform.

Like the Corporation, the Runner's goal is also to score a total of seven Agenda points. However, the only way the Runner can do so is by breaking into the Corporation's Data Forts and stealing Agenda cards. The Runner also wins if the Corporation exhausts its R&D (draw pile) and cannot draw a card.

The Runner, then, doesn't build Data Forts, but must still bring Program, Hardware and Resource cards into play before they can be used. (See 'The tools of the trade' for an example.)

Measure And Countermeasure

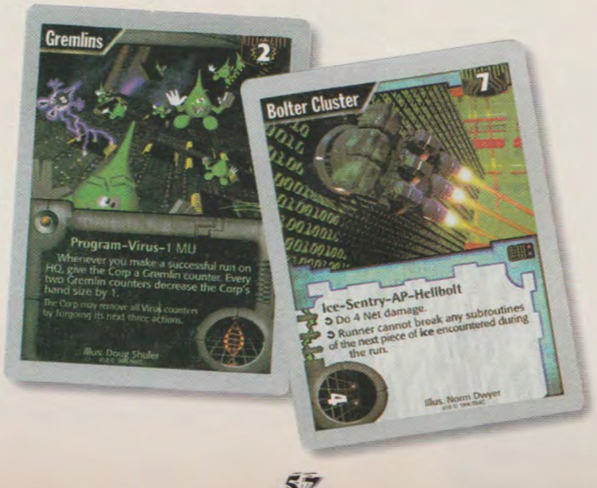
Netrunner is intended to be played as a match of two games, with players switching roles. The winner of each game scores 10 points, whereas the loser scores the number of Agenda points they managed to accumulate.

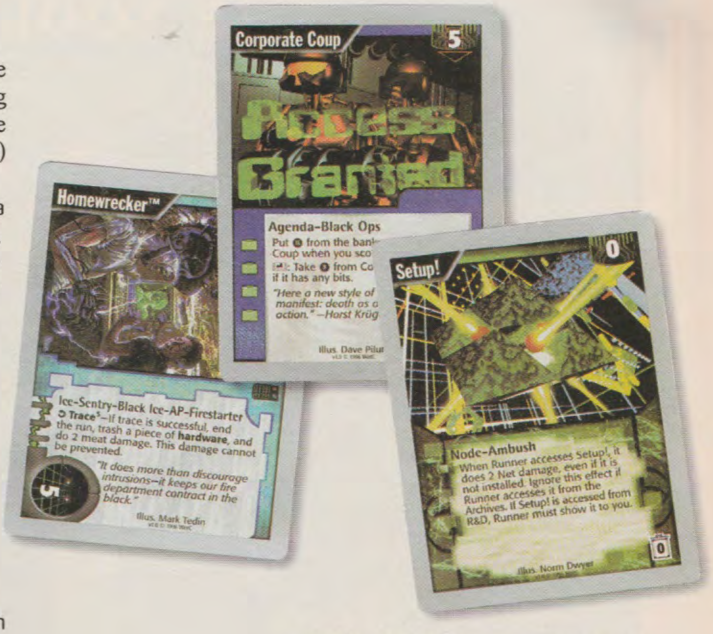
At the start of each game, both players draw five cards and take five 'bit' counters. Bits are the currency of *Netrunner,* and signify a combination of money, resources, and information. They are used to pay for cards and other actions that have a cost. The game then proceeds in turns, with the Corporation going first.

"Making a Run is the most important of a Runner's four actions"

In each turn, the Corporation player first draws a card from R&D, and then takes three actions. As an action, the Corporation can draw another card, gain a bit, play an Operation, or install an Ice, Agenda, Node, or Upgrade in a Data Fort. Ice, Agenda, Node and Upgrade cards are all installed face down and inactive. At various times, the Corporation can choose to 'Rez' (activate) a face-down card, by paying its activation cost in bits.

The Cyberpunk 2020 roleplaying system from R Talsorian games is due to be re-released in a third edition later this year.





Finally, the Corp may advance an installed Agenda. To score an Agenda, the Corp must install it in a Data Fort, and then spend actions and bits to advance the card, with each advance costing one action and one bit. Once the card has been advanced a number of times equal to its difficulty value, the Corporation completes its plan and scores the Agenda, gaining its Agenda points and any special ability. Once all three actions have been performed the turn ends, and any cards beyond the maximum hand size (which begins at five) must be discarded.

The Runner's turn is similar, except that the Runner has four actions and no mandatory draw. As an action the Runner can draw a card, gain a bit, install a Program, Hardware, or Resource card, play a Prep, or make a run on a Data Fort.

Making a run is the most important of a Runner's actions, and the only one whereby the two players interact directly. The Runner chooses which Data Fort to try and penetrate. If there are no Ice cards protecting it, the Runner automatically gains access to one of more of the cards held in it. If the card is an Agenda, the Runner scores the card, gaining its Agenda points. Accessing Nodes and Upgrades allows the Runner to pay the card's Trash Cost in bits to 'destroy' it, sending it the to Corporation's Archives.

If Ice protects the Data Fort, the Runner must deal with each card in turn. The corporation has the option to 'Rez' each piece of Ice, paying its activation cost. Each Ice program has certain Subroutines (affects), and the Runner can attempt to prevent them by using

THE TOOLS OF THE TRADE

In order to defeat the Corporation, the Runner must make the most of limited resources and plan carefully. Here's an example of a Runner's set up after a few turns...

NET RUNNER
DECKMASTER
Fall Guy
0
Resource

Above are the Runner's Stack (draw pile), Trash (discard pile) and current pool of bits.

Cloak
7
Program–Stealth–1 MU
Dogcatcher
3
Program–Icebreaker–1 MU
Pile Driver
1
Program–Icebreaker–Noisy–1 MU

In the top row are the Runner's programs. The two Icebreakers can be used to defeat some of the Corporation's Ice programs. The Cloak prgram, while expensive, gives the Runner a 'free' pool of bits to spend when using the Icebreakers.

Techtronica™ Utility Suit
6
"Green Knight" Surge Buffers
0
Hardware
Prevents 1 Net damage each turn.

The second row is used for hardware cards. The Cyberdeck is a special computer used on runs – this one allows more programs to be installed, and gives a pool of bits to spend when defeating the Corp's Trace Ice. The Buffers act as 'armour', preventing damage from Ice programs.

Trauma Team™
0

The last row of cards represents the Runner's Resources. The Trauma Team card represents a medical insurance policy, and provides counters that can be used to prevent certain kinds of damage.

Netrunner Starter Decks include both a Corporation and a Runner deck, and are playable straight out of the box – unlike a lot of card games we could mention.

Icebreaker programs. Any remaining Subroutines then take place. Often with dire results for the Runner.

THE FUTURE OF CARD GAMES?

Simply put, *Netrunner* is superb. The problem here is not finding a good aspect of the game, but finding a bad one.

For a start, the production values throughout are excellent. Everything from the box design to the cards themselves is impressive and solidly put together. Likewise, the rulebook is clearly written and easy to understand – a pleasant change from the almost universally low standard that seems to dog collectable card games.

But *Netrunner* is far more than a good-looking game. It's a great playing game as well. In the quest for the 'next big thing' in CCGs over the past year or so, there's been a tendency for game designers to introduce more complexity or combine elements from other styles of game. With *Netrunner,* though, Richard Garfield has gone in the opposite direction. The core of the game – the rules themselves – are exceedingly simple. Indeed, it's obvious that a great deal of effort has gone into evading the

Worm
4
Program–Icebreaker–Worm–1 MU
Break wall subroutine.
+1 strength
"It's hard to describe–but don't eat anything just before you watch it go into action."
Illus. Anson Maddocks
2
Raptor
1
Program–Icebreaker–Killer–1 MU
Break sentry subroutine.
+1 strength
"There's nothing quite like the screech of a Raptor echoing through the data halls as it sweeps in for a kill."
–Kiyote
Illus. Higgins & King
1

VIR

Without the Runner, the Corporation's life would be easy. As it is, though, the company's valuable data must be protected...

The back row of cards (below) represent the contents of the Corp's Data Fortresses. From left to right are the Archives (discard piles, currently unprotected), R&D (draw pile), HQ (the Corporation's hand, signified by its bit pool), an activated Node, and a Fort containing an Upgrade and a card that's been advanced three times. Is it an Agenda, or a nasty trap for the Runner? Only the Corporation knows for sure...

NET RUNNER
DECKMASTER
Planning Consultants
Operation–Gray Ops

tricky issues that plague many CCGs, *Magic* included, such as timing problems and the order of effects, simply by avoiding them altogether.

That's not say that *Netrunner* isn't a complex and subtle game – in fact, it's one of the most challenging CCGs around – but this comes from the players, not from the rules. Like Chess or Go, the rules are simple, but the possibilities endless.

Another thing that makes *Netrunner* stand out is the importance of bluffing and other head games. Here the Corporation has the advantage over the Runner, as nearly all of its cards are initially played face down. The Runner player can tell some things by the card's position, but other than that, they're in the dark until they they take some action to find out what's really going on. No other collectable card game has quite such potential for playing mind games.

BALANCING ACTS

Perhaps the most outstanding aspect of *Netrunner*, though, is the balance that the game strikes between the two sides. Considering the difficulty many companies have had in creating a playable game when both players use the same set of rules, creating one like *Netrunner* where the two sides play very differently is an even more impressive achievement. Not only are the Runner and Corporation almost perfectly matched, but each side presents unique challenges and has it's own appeal.

At the centre of this lies the balance between active and reactive play. The Corporation is active in the sense that it controls the victory conditions of the game – the Agenda cards – but can only affect the Runner when they choose to make a run. The Runner, on the other hand, is active in having the choice of when and where to confront the Corporation, but can only react to the Corporation's plans.

WHEN THE PIXELS SETTLE

There are only two potential problems with *Netrunner*. The first lies in the card art, which is a mixture of computer generated and more traditional styles. Of course, art is very much a matter of taste, but it has to be said that most computer art looks best when it's moving, and the static images on some of the *Netrunner* cards are less than inspiring.

For any aspiring Runners with Internet access, there's currently a superb on-line Netrunner competition on the World Wide Web. See Despatches (starts page 8) for more details.

And the players said...

BEN: "It's a great game – but you need to be into cyberpunk fiction to get the best from it."

STEVE: "Stop hogging that deck and give me another go!"

PAUL: "Not only is it brilliant, but you don't need to spend loads of money to have good game."

EM: "If only computers were this much fun in real life.."

Secondly, the game tends to assume that the players have a basic understanding of cyberpunk science fiction, and the concepts behind it. If you're not familiar with the idea of cyberspace, you may have problems understanding what's supposed to be going on.

Apart from that, though, *Netrunner* is almost without fault. It's certainly the best new card game in the last year, and arguably the best since *Magic* started it all. Richard Garfield has done it again.

Andy Butcher

Score 9/10

UALLY SECURE

Rex
Cerberus
Data Wall
Holovid Campaign
NET RUNNER
DECKMASTER

The horizontal cards are Ice programs that the Corporation has installed to protect it's Data Forts. The face-up cards have been 'Rezzed', or activated.

GURPS Goblins

Steve Jackson Games ☎ **001 512 447 7866** **$21.95** **June**

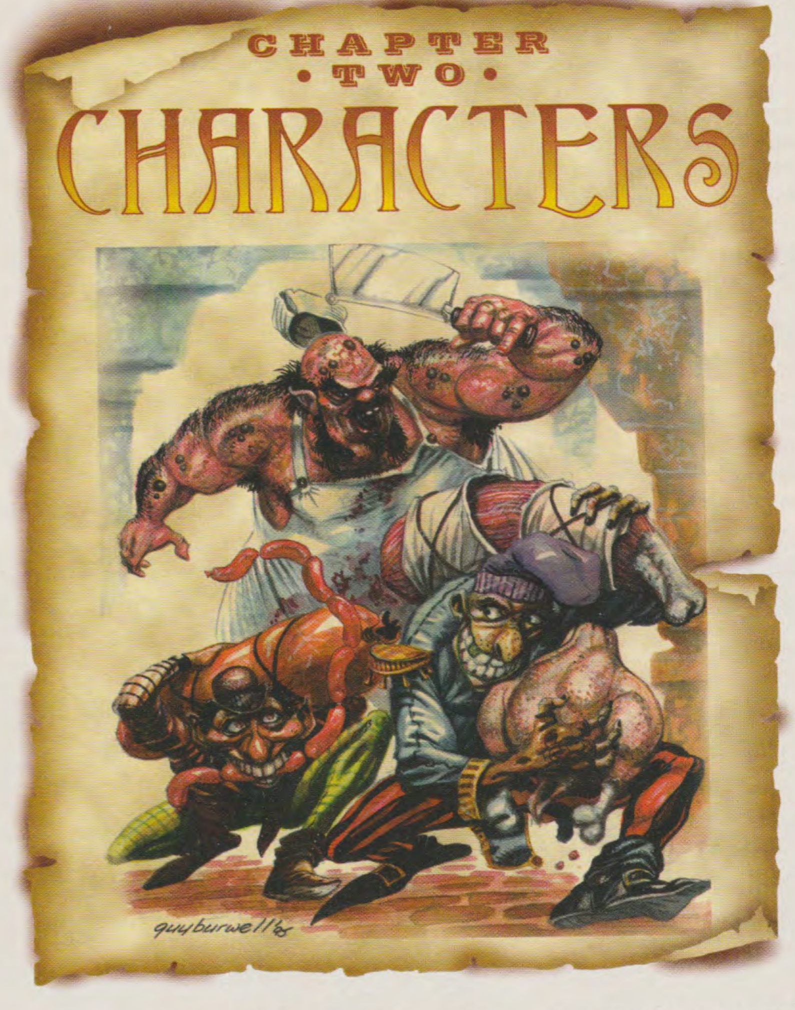
Life in London is nasty, brutish and short. And so are you.

GURPS – Generic Universal Roleplaying System – is designed for any sort of campaign in any setting. There are core rules and supplements for backgrounds from fantasy to cyberpunk – some are translations of other games' worlds and some, like *Goblins*, are brand new.

GURPS Goblins has a slightly misleading title. It is not a supplement about fantasy goblins in the conventional sense, but a complete sourcebook for roleplaying a race of goblins inhabiting a mythical London in the mid 1800s. There are no humans in this world – nor any other any races – just goblins.

These goblins come in every shape and size (see the Life is Hard panel opposite for more info on that) and are really just a device to allow you to indulge your imagination in a pretend Georgian London. Your characters can wilfully ignore the suffering, ritual child abuse and crippling social debilitation caused by rampant alcoholism that were part of London life in that era because... well, because they're goblins and goblins don't give a shit about that sort of thing.

Goblins has a fantastic atmosphere that's absorbing because it's so well detailed. There's a whole page devoted to various methods of lighting pipes and cheroots in Georgian London, from the ever-present candle in every decent club to the show off's favourite – the Promethean match – which is a little roll of paper dipped in chlorate of potash, with a tiny glass bead containing sulphuric acid embedded in it which has to be tapped or smashed to produce a flame. There are also many excerpts from contemporary books – both real and imaginary – detailing events such as going to the theatre or being tried in court, and these make *Goblins* one of the best sourcebooks it's ever been my pleasure to read.



CHAPTER
• TWO •
CHARACTERS

It doesn't end there. *Goblins* is not only well researched but also very well written. It's not often that a set of rules makes me laugh out loud, but *Goblins* did on several occasions. The sparkling prose really brings to life this vast comic soap opera of goblin London with its urchins, pickpockets, chimney sweeps and King.

Goblins has its flaws, though – most notably in its character generation

Look at that – not a diced carrot in sight.

A friendly people, goblins are always popping in to say, 'Hello'.

system. Having seen the neat systems of games such as *Shadowrun*, *Feng Shui* and *Everway*, I was disappointed with the mish-mash of random rolls on difficult-to-use tables that *Goblins* requires. Combine this with the clever but mathematically intimidating *GURPS* point system and you have a bit of a nightmare for players and referees alike.

There are much better ways of achieving the same sort of results – the use of character templates is just one of many – but it seems that it would be impossible to incorporate them within the *GURPS* system. Perhaps it's time for a major revision of the rules to allow for the sort of free-wheeling campaign that *Goblins* advocates.

> **"Sparkling prose really brings to life this vast comic soap opera of goblin London"**

Unfortunately, this flaw in the generation process results in characters with too many personality facets, making them difficult to roleplay properly in a campaign situation.

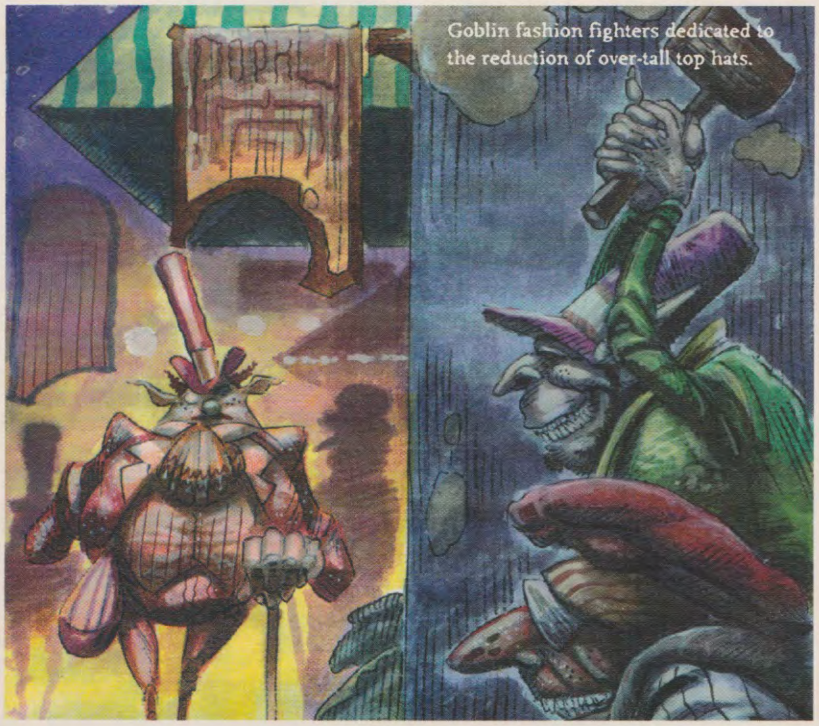
There is also a potential problem for some referees. *Goblins* requires a certain type of open-ended refereeing that is just not to everybody's taste. The author recommends that a potential *GURPS* referee should create a 'relatively large' number of NPCs for the players to interact with, should not bother very much with physically mapping any terrain, and should be prepared to 'wing it' (run the game solely in reaction to the players' actions rather than prepare detailed scenarios) in any *GURPS* campaign. This is intended to reflect the anarchic and crowded nature of *Goblins*' society and is, in my experience, a great way to run any kind of city adventure provided you enjoy roleplaying that way. When discussing *Goblins* with other referees, though, I was told by a number of them that they have never run – and indeed don't feel any particular inclination to run – this particular style of game.

On the whole, *Goblins* has such a wealth of wonderful background material that it's worth getting for that alone, and indeed it would be awarded an **arcane** 9/10 if it stopped there. Unfortunately, there are some elements of the rules mechanics that are much less convincing.

Steve Faragher

Score 7/10

Interplay are working on a CRPG based on *GURPS*. It will be set in the near future and look similar to *Ultima 7*, allegedly. It is scheduled for a Christmas release.



Goblin fashion fighters dedicated to the reduction of over-tall top hats.

Life is Hard

Under a Wandering Star

Goblins are born with no hereditary traits. Young goblins start life as identical babies weighing exactly three pounds and measuring exactly 12 inches long. From the moment they are born they begin to develop the characteristics that will make them individuals in later life. Their young bodies are extraordinarily malleable and bend and contort to match their surroundings. To reflect this, *Goblins* has a chart to roll on for each of the first six years. The first character I created, Lucretius Allbright, spent his first six years variously. He was locked in a breadbin, hurled across the room, passed through a mangle, abandoned in the snow, dropped down the sewers and flung into the Thames. And all that before his first birthday.

After these misfortunes, Luke is enrolled into a public school where he spends a blissful two years growing even fatter than he already was (thanks to being locked in the breadbin) on the excellent dinners provided. Of course, he is also bullied because of his weight – but he doesn't care. When you've been through what Luke has by the age of six, a little bullying doesn't scare you. After Luke has finished at public school he joins the Bank of England as an apprentice clerk and rapidly develops the pale complexion, thin hair and pronounced hunch that's expected of him. After a few years of being exploited he is thrown out on to the streets. He is 14 years old, 6' 9" tall, weighs 375lbs and has arms that are two feet longer than they should be: he is a mess of phobias (aquaphobia, claustrophobia, technophobia, acrophobia, scotophobia and rupophobia, if you must know) and bad personal habits. Adventure awaits him...

Magic: A Manua

A supplement for Earthdawn

£12.99 FASA ☎ 001 312 243 5660 Out now

How it works, what it can do and how to use it — *Earthdawn's* magic is explained

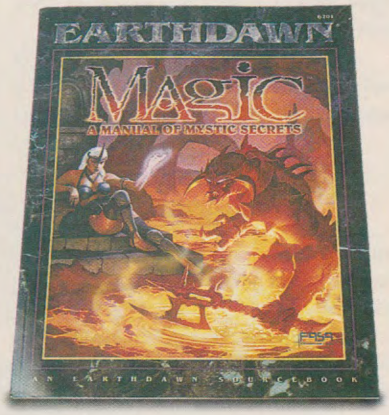
All player characters in *Earthdawn* are Adepts, able to harness and channel magical energy to enhance their abilities – a Warrior and an Illusionist use magic in different ways, but it gives both of them great powers.

Magic is the single most important force in *Earthdawn.* Rather than being yet another medieval environment with a spell list bolted on, the game is set in a world where the politics, economics and society itself have been shaped by magic at every level. It's influence can be seen everywhere, from simple light crystals to mighty stone airships that sail the skies. Magic is the source of great wealth and power, but it is also a double-edged sword. Its presence attracted the Horrors that nearly destroyed the world, but also provides Adepts with the talents and abilities they use to fight against the terrible creatures.

Magic: A Manual Of Mystic Secrets takes a deeper look at the force that binds the world of *Earthdawn* together, expanding on the information given in the basic rules and previous supplements, and introducing new powers and capabilities. Perhaps more importantly, though, it also discusses the nature of magic in *Earthdawn,* and goes some way to explaining how the various types of magic actually work in the game.

The book is split into a number of sections, each of which deals with a specific aspect of magic. Blood Magic discusses the history and development of this potent form of magic, explains its various uses and possible dangers, and includes several new ways for Adepts and non-player characters to use it.

Adept Magic offers two new ways for Adepts to use their powers, Talent Knacks and Half-Magic. Talent Knacks are specialised uses of existing Talents that enable Adepts to expand their Talents and give them individual powers. Arrow Cutting, for example, is a Knack that allows Swordmaster Adepts to deflect missiles with his Riposte Talent. Half-Magic, on the other hand, represents the various rituals, skills, and other



knowledge that is imparted by a an Adept's Discipline but not covered by specific Skills and Talents.

Next comes Thread Magic, which looks at the nature of the bonds that adepts can tie between their magical pattern and others and includes some optional rules to expand their use, including several Knacks

JANET AULISIO 1996.

Back to basics?

In addition to the new rules and options for existing characters, *Magic: A Manual Of Mystic Secrets* also offers a completely new Discipline, the Shaman. This uncommon form of magician is most often found amongst Barsaive's primitive tribes, and a Shaman's powers and abilities are based on observation and understanding of nature and natural forces, rather than academic study and ritualised learning.

Rather than simply being another magician Discipline hastily tacked onto the *Earthdawn* system, it's obvious that some thought has gone into the Shaman, for they have several unique rules associated with them. Their methods of learning and casting spells have several key differences that make them stand out from the other magician Disciplines, and the mix of Talents and spells available to them has been well thought out.

In all, then, the Shaman is an interesting and well-balanced addition to the *Earthdawn* rules, and offers great potential for players looking for a slightly different type of character to play.

Of Mystic Secrets

for the Thread Weaving Talent.

After these three chapters, the rest of *Magic: A Manual Of Mystic Secrets* concerns itself mainly with full magicians – those Adepts able to cast spells – and their powers. First comes Spell Magic, which clarifies the current rules for spells, offers many new ways in which magicians can use their powers, and introduces a new type of magical item, the Matrix Item.

Enchanting explains the theory and practise behind the manufacture of magical items in *Earthdawn*, from the everyday fire-starters and warm cloaks, to legendary items. Included are explanations of the different methods that can be used to imbue an object with magic, a close look at True elements and a discussion of Alchemy, which is used to produce the many potions and salves that adventurers often make use of.

Leading on from these two sections comes Astral Space, which defines the nature of this parallel dimension from which all magical energy comes, the various ways in which Adepts interact with it, and methods of observing and even entering the Astral Plane. The Netherworlds – other planes accessible via Astral Space – are also discussed, as are the Elemental Planes.

Summoning concerns itself with the denizens of the Astral Space and the Netherworlds – Spirits and Elementals. As well as defining the various types that exist, their motivations and their attitudes, the section also discusses the various ways Adepts can summon Spirits. Included are new rules that enable Elementalists and Nethermancers to use Half-Magic to summon certain types of Spirit and gain services from them.

The penultimate chapter, cunningly titled Other Types Of Magic (they like making things clear at FASA) deals with the various forms of magic that don't fit logically into any of the other sections. Included are rules for Ritual Magic, where two or more magicians combine their power, Familiars, Divination, the Passions and a new Discipline, the Shaman (see Back to basics?).

Finally, the book ends with a discussion of Spell Design. This looks at all the elements of designing new spells in exhaustive detail, both from the point of view of the character and the players, including a step-by-step design process and an in-depth discussion of spells in *Earthdawn*. There are also a range of ready-made new spells for all the various magician Disciplines.

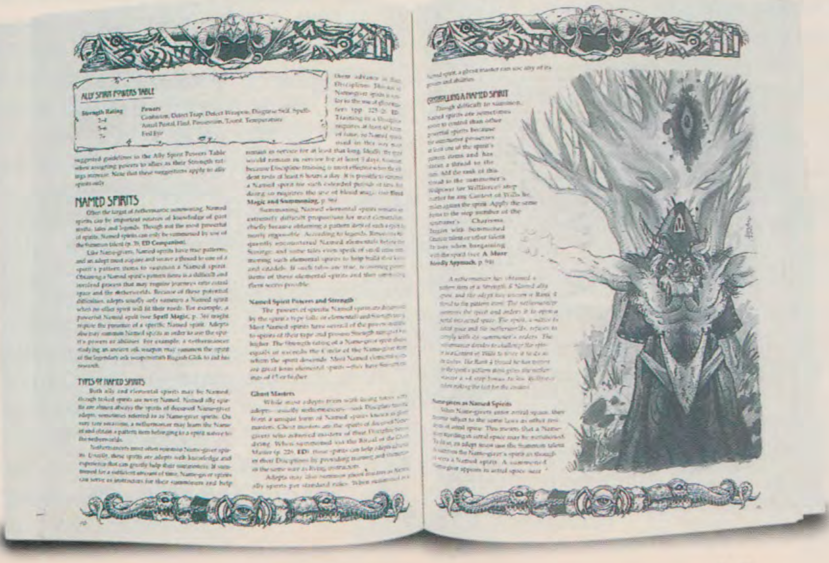
ADEPT MAGIC

Magic: A Manual Of Mystic Secrets is a well written, carefully balanced and useful addition to *Earthdawn*. Having said that, it's not particularly well suited to (or necessary for) inexperienced or casual players of the game. Most of the material included here is quite advanced, and picks up where previous supplements have left off – to get the most out of it requires the *Earthdawn Companion* (something of a must for any *Earthdawn* group, anyway), and the *Adept's Way and Horrors* books should also come in handy.

For anyone with a regular *Earthdawn* campaign, though, *Magic: A Manual Of Mystic Secrets* is very helpful. The new and optional rules enable referees to expand the scope of magic in their games, and there's a lot of good advice given on how to integrate the new material within existing games.

What will prove most useful about the book, though, is not the new rules but the discussions of the nature of magic in *Earthdawn*. With magic playing such a pivotal role in the game, it's always been somewhat disappointing that the mechanics behind it haven't been particularly well explained. By doing so, the book helps to give referees and players alike a better 'feel' for the *Earthdawn* world and how it 'works'.

Andy Butcher



While *Earthdawn* is set in a mythic past FASA's other roleplaying system, *Shadowrun*, describes the future of the same world. Players of both games will find that *Magic: A Manual Of Mystic Secrets* helps to explain some of the apparent differences between the magic of both systems.

Score 8/10

Space Hulk 2n

A board game Games Workshop ☎ 01773 713213 Out Now £40

The *Aliens*-esque board game of bug-hunting is back.

Space Hulk the motion picture.... Games Workshop have made a short, real-action film based on *Space Hulk*, which they show exclusively at their Games Day conventions. The film climaxes with the immortal line, "I have seen my enemy, and it is... an abomination." They followed that up with a second film, pitting Marines against some hilarious Space Orks and a Khornate Chaos Marine.

In 1985 the film *Aliens* stamped upon our imaginations the dramatic theme of the bug-hunt. A squad of heavily armed, gung-ho marines is out to slap about some bug-eyed monsters. Ignorant of the ferocious power of their quarry, they swagger into a labyrinthine hellscape only to be minced by razor-clawed alien monstrosities. This is the scene which *Space Hulk* seeks to deliver, and it succeeds admirably in evoking its themes of fear, tension and desperation.

SPACE HULK
CITADEL
WARHAMMER 40,000
A BATTLE TO THE DEATH IN THE CHILLING DEPTHS OF SPACE
GAMES WORKSHOP

In Games Workshop's bug-hunt, the two leading roles you may be cast in are the Genestealers and the Terminator Space Marines. The Genestealers are cosmic parasites whose sole purpose is to contaminate and corrupt humanity with their alien DNA. They drift into human space via derelict wrecks known as Space Hulks, much as fleas might penetrate your living room aboard the hapless, family dog. They are, of course, your quintessential alien nightmare – the supreme predator organism. Being relentlessly hostile, hexapodous, threshing machines whose claws tear through steel like paper, the 'stealers don't really endear themselves to polite society and thus must be exterminated with extreme prejudice. Enter the Space Marines, humanity's finest pest control experts. Armed and armoured to the teeth, these chaps are xenophobes to a man, and so are quite happy to board Space Hulks to purge Genestealers and almost certainly be torn to bits in the bloody process.

Space Hulk recreates these Marine cleansing operations, and the Genestealers' corresponding lack of cooperation, through a series of missions. Each mission is a set-piece that enables the players to progress through the phases of an entire campaign in manageable chunks. The mission brief details the sector of the Hulk in which the encounter takes place, the forces available to the belligerents, their mission objectives and victory conditions.

Revamps for Old...

So, should veteran *Space Hulk* players shell out on the second edition? Consider the evidence...

New miniatures: ten beautifully sculpted, plastic Terminators which are the business; with proper flamers, power swords and everything. There is also a new 'stealer model, the version from *Advanced Space Crusade*, but he hardly represents a radical advance for Genestealer physiology.

All-new artwork: the Hulk sections are attractively rendered and their schemes are far more varied than those on the original pieces, with which they are compatible. However, the selection of pieces remains the same.

12 new missions: considering *Space Hulk* first edition contained only six missions, which are also detailed here, this is a considerable improvement. The new missions are as engaging as any previously published, although there are no major plot innovations.

Gameplay: is slightly faster and more entertaining due to the new symbol dice and a couple of other tweaks. For instance, blips now represent a number of stealers from 0-6, adding significantly to the tension. The flamer operates far more appropriately, because now a shot consists of a trail of 1-12 small bursts incinerating a square each, rather than one large burst arbitrarily charring an entire room or corridor section. Storm bolters are also more lethal thanks to the Overkill rule, whereby a critical hit can blow away the target 'stealer and an adjacent colleague.

The major change though, is the ditching of the timer system. Many players didn't use it in the first place, but for others it was vital for creating a tension-laden atmosphere. Its loss does deny the 'stealers a cunning tactical ploy – where they increased the pressure on the Marines by bushwhacking the Sergeants first, thus reducing Marine turn time. It also shifts the balance of power further towards the Marines when the game was hardly balanced in the Genestealers' favour previously.

However, these changes are mainly cosmetic, and the game's basic body of rules is cloned straight from the first edition. Though *Space Hulk* second ed' is an improvement, its really just a *de luxe* version of the original. Thus, you'd truly have to be a hard-bitten *Space Hulk* fanatic to justify the £40 upgrade cost.

Edition

And the players said...

BEN: "Games like this are the reason I started roleplaying in the first place."

STEVE: "A refreshing blast."

JAMES: "Both guns blazing, non-stop fun."

A typical mission involves all ten marines advancing through a network of rooms and corridors to reach, for example, a cryogenic chamber where they must destroy all the deep-freeze pods before the occupants emerge from hibernation. Each Marine has a number of action points which are expended as he moves, turns, fires etc. There are no strict sequences for actions, so an individual may combine actions as he pleases until he runs out of action points. Thus, a Marine may advance up a corridor firing until he reaches a junction, then turn and set over-watch to cover the approach to a new corridor before the Genestealer's turn. The 'stealer forces, meanwhile, also use action points, but they have two different modes of play. They initially emerge from their strategically placed entry areas as radar blips picked up by Marine motion trackers. These trackers are notoriously imprecise so a blip could indicate anything from 0-6 'stealers – only the 'stealer player knows for sure. As the blips close in on the Marine positions their true nature is revealed only when they enter a Marine's direct line of sight. Thus, blips are progressively converted into their respective number of 'stealers as they move in for the kill.

> "The Stealers are deadly in close combat, and fast!"

This style of play works very well, successfully capturing the tension of the bug-hunt. The board layouts are very cramped and labyrinthine, neatly representing the claustrophobic conditions of the Hulk. They make it difficult for the Marines to manoeuvre as they desperately try to take the board's vital intersections. The rules are elegantly simple and allow extremely fast gameplay, with an average encounter only taking an hour to play. The contrast in the forces' respective strengths, and thus their tactical styles, is also well realised. The 'stealers are deadly in close combat and very fast. Thus, they must outflank the Marines and use wave attacks to overwhelm their foes' positions. The Marines, on the other hand, are slow, few and doomed if they can't keep the Genestealers at bay. Every Marine life is precious, so a Marine player quickly learns caution and to fear the aliens.

SPACE HULK RULEBOOK
SPACE HULK MISSION BOOK

The original *Space Hulk* was first published in 1989 and spawned three supplements: *Deathwing, Genestealer* and the *Space Hulk Campaigns*. No supplements are planned for the new edition thus far.

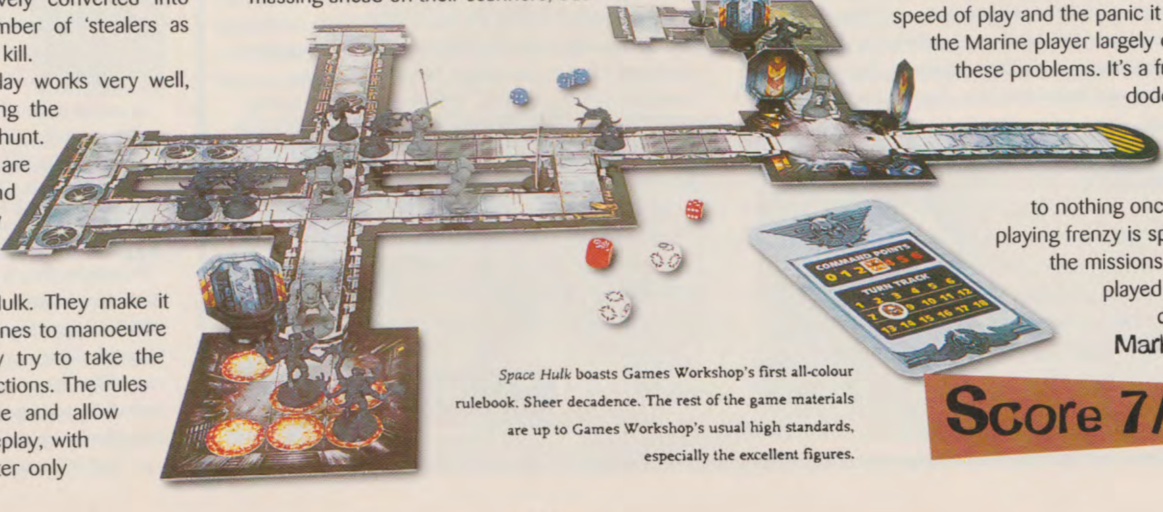
This makes for a nail-biting game for the Marine player. The Marine forces advance slowly, corridor by corridor, trying to establish as many cross-fire kill-zones as possible. Tension builds as they can see the alien forces massing ahead on their scanners, but it's impossible to gauge the enemy's strength. Then the Genestealers attack, swarming down the corridors from all angles at once as the Marines rake them with bolter and flamer fire, knowing that a jammed weapon will mean a face full of ferocious bug-eyed death. Unfortunately, though, the game's drama and tactical challenge is mostly found on the Marine's side. The 'stealers are single tactic troops – they all perform the same role and there's no reason to care about an individual's life as a Marine player must. This is the game's major weakness, as it makes playing the Genestealers rather like fielding in cricket. It's the humdrum bit you tolerate while waiting for your turn to do the exciting batting and bowling bit. The fact that playing one side quickly becomes a bit of a chore drastically reduces the appeal of what would otherwise be a highly addictive game.

The game's scope is also a little limited. Although the missions are all entertaining and present different challenges for the Marine player, they have a tendency to become a bit samey after a while. Most games tend to follow a set formula, no matter what the mission objectives, of Marines flaming key junctions and watching side corridors whilst the 'stealer player sacrifices hordes of aliens praying for a weapon jam.

For some time though, *Space Hulk's* speed of play and the panic it induces in the Marine player largely overcomes these problems. It's a fun game, a doddle to play, but it'll probably fade away to nothing once the initial playing frenzy is spent and all the missions have been played through to completion.

Mark Donald

Score 7/10



Space Hulk boasts Games Workshop's first all-colour rulebook. Sheer decadence. The rest of the game materials are up to Games Workshop's usual high standards, especially the excellent figures.

A supplement for the *AD&D Birthright* campaign

The Book of Magecraft

£11.99 TSR ☎ 01223 212517 Out now

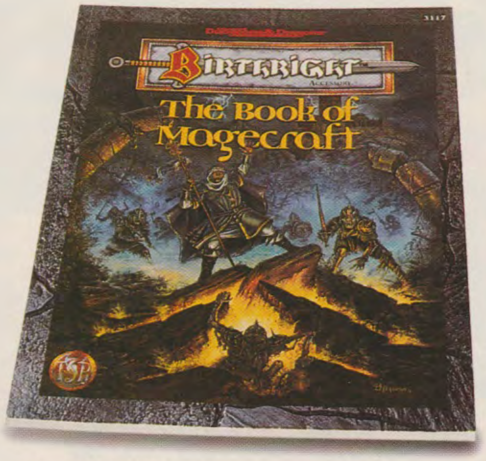
why magic missile individuals when you can target entire regiments?

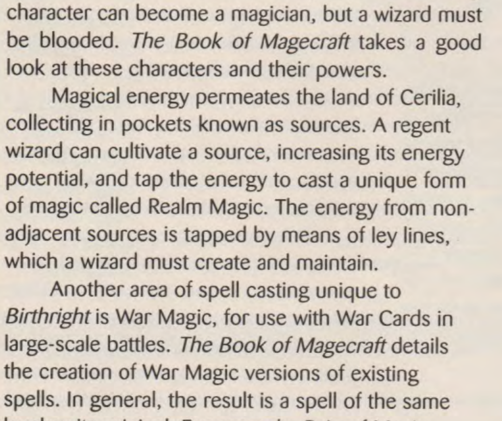
Magic in *Birthright* is substantially different from that in other *AD&D* campaign worlds. Mages are either magicians or wizards: wizards are normal *AD&D* magic users, while magicians are specialists in divination and illusion who cannot cast spells above second level from any other school. Any character can become a magician, but a wizard must be blooded. *The Book of Magecraft* takes a good look at these characters and their powers.

Magical energy permeates the land of Cerilia, collecting in pockets known as sources. A regent wizard can cultivate a source, increasing its energy potential, and tap the energy to cast a unique form of magic called Realm Magic. The energy from non-adjacent sources is tapped by means of ley lines, which a wizard must create and maintain.

Another area of spell casting unique to *Birthright* is War Magic, for use with War Cards in large-scale battles. *The Book of Magecraft* details the creation of War Magic versions of existing spells. In general, the result is a spell of the same level as its original. For example, Rain of Magic Missiles is a first-level spell that targets an entire unit. Given the power of these spells, you can see why the rules emphasise the rarity of true wizards. Although casting fireballs willy nilly into a battlefield is great fun, it's a little unbalanced – a fighter of a similar level couldn't have as significant an effect.

Realm Magic is similarly powerful, but refined for political and economic use. For instance, coffer credit – the spell that likes to say 'yes' – allows you to magically conjure a loan from your future income, while royal facade gives your homestead the appearance of an 'aesthetic marvel' – towers of crystal, castles of gold, that sort of thing.





The Book of Magecraft gives a varied and imaginative set of Realm, Battle and ordinary spells designed specifically for use with *Birthright*. Many of the latter are concerned with the protection of ley lines and sources, as well as – naturally – attacking those of rivals.

What else? There are rules for finding, using and borrowing sources and ley lines. The magician character class is described, along with a few associated character kits. You've got the intriguing Royal College of Sorcery, a list of *Birthright*-specific magic items and artifacts, and a seemingly tagged-on description of a group of legendary creatures that are said to grant boons to wizards.

It's a fairly solid accessory, though perhaps not as inspiring as it could be. Ordinary magic users will profit from its good selection of spells, while regent wizards will find it almost indispensable.

Cliff Ramshaw

Score 7/10

Serpent Moon

A collection of scenarios for *Nephilim*
£11 Chaosium
☎ 001 510 547 7681 Out now

So history is one huge occult conspiracy. So you're an immortal non-corporeal being with a human host. So you're seeking enlightenment. But what do you actually *do*? This has been a problem with *Nephilim* from the very beginning, and this book – made up of four loosely linked scenarios – goes some way to answering the question.

There is going to be a mega-huge astrological convergence. The Templars plan to exploit it to change the mystical nature of the universe. The PCs will gradually discover what is going on. A photocopy of an ancient Persian document leads to a society of 'occult enthusiasts', headed by a real magician who is in turn dealing with the Templars. This leads – via two relatively unrelated scenarios – to one of the most apocalyptic climaxes I've ever seen. It's so apocalyptic that, if our heroes screw up really badly (and these are PCs we're talking about), you probably won't have a campaign left to play with.

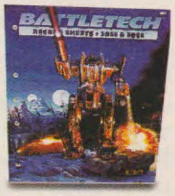
There's also the chance that a giant wicker tyrannosaur will comes to life and cause major pile ups on the interstate. Despite the promises of a serious treatment of the occult, someone's tongue is pretty firmly in their cheek, me thinks.

So a *Nephilim* campaign turns out to be a little like supercharged *Call of Cthulhu* session – investigations, clues, secret cults and earth-shattering rituals. This makes the book hard work to read and demanding to run but, in the hands of a good referee with a feel for the *Nephilim* universe, potentially very rewarding to play.

Andrew Rilstone Score 6/10

BattleTech Record Sheets 3025 & 3026 and 3055 & 3058

A pair of accessories for *BattleTech*
£10.99 each FASA Corporation
001 312 243 5660 Out now



These are play aids for the *BattleTech* gamer who has everything. Forget the hours spent filling in records for mechs and military vehicles – these do it for you.

The *3025 & 3026* book, at 224

pages of over 200 records, is the slightly smaller of the two, while the *3055 & 3058* volume weighs in at 256 pages and 250 sheets. Both are hole-punched American-style for five-ring binders, and the pages are perforated along the spine so you can tear 'em out and start making war. Each gives all the stats and info for your machine, with the requisite number of armour points to cross off during play. Most of the mechs have a few variants listed and details of their 'technology base' to aid play balance. The hardware featured ranges from trusty old Warhammers right up to the Clans' deadly heavyweights.

But are these really worth the cash? Unless you play *BattleTech* morning, noon and night, you'll never use everything in here, and you'll need a photocopier to get any serious use from them. There's no space on them for notes of your own, and the books are poorly structured. Mechs are listed by tonnage and not alphabetically, there's no index, and the appendix at the back is no more than a checklist. The cover art is nice, but these are nothing to get excited about – they're books of record sheets. You can get exactly the same thing in a few minutes with the basic rules, a pencil and a copy of the relevant *BattleTech Technical Readout*.

How about putting these and the *Readouts* on a CD-ROM, with a facility to run off as many record sheets as you like? It'd be economical and even good for the environment…

Jim Swallow **Score 4/10**

Player's Secrets of Binsada

A sourcebook for the *AD&D Birthright* campaign

£4.99 **TSR ☎ 01223 212517** **Out now**

BINSADA
BIRTHRIGHT

The Khinasi domain of Binsada is wonderfully unique. It's a matriarchal society, so only female characters need apply for regency. As a player you are encouraged to take on the role of the current queen's sister. The much-loved queen has fallen victim to congenital insanity so, with the aid of a magical turban of disguise, you must assume her identity and rule in her stead. It's up to you to decide if and when to tell the populace the truth.

The Binsadans are a nomadic, clannish people for whom riding is second-nature – a bit like the Mongols of old (the founder of modern Binsada is playfully named either 'Chenghas Zaran' or 'Tengis Rhan'). Their main fighting force

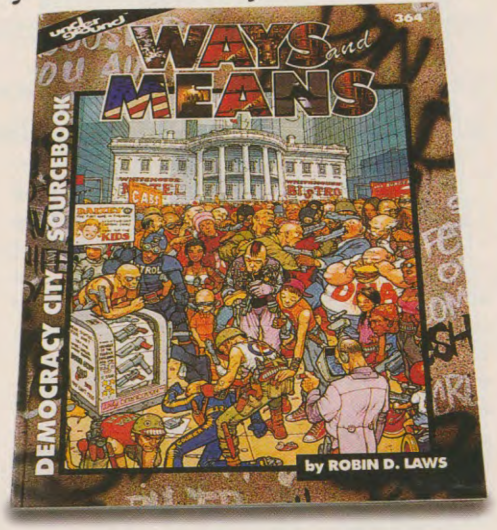
➔

A sourcebook for *Underground*

Ways and Means

£11 **Mayfair Games ☎ 001 847 647 9650** **Out now**

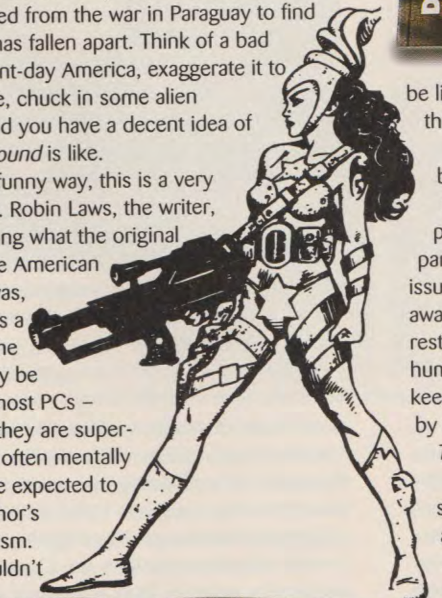
Mr genetically enhanced veteran goes to washington…



The White House has burned to the ground; the Capitol is in ruins, occupied by disenfranchised black American squatters. Not to worry – improved versions of the great American monuments have been rebuilt in Democracy City, which floats on an anti-gravity platform above the derelict remains. The new Lincoln Memorial is an Animatronic robot that recites the Gettysburg Address and sings jingles for MacRaney's Hamburgers.

This is 2021 and in Washington, more than anywhere else in the world of *Underground*, the American Dream is dead.

Underground is hard to categorise – imagine *Judge Dredd* re-made by Oliver Stone. Nominally, it's about superheroes: super-powered veterans who've returned from the war in Paraguay to find that America has fallen apart. Think of a bad trend in present-day America, exaggerate it to the nth degree, chuck in some alien technology and you have a decent idea of what *Underground* is like.



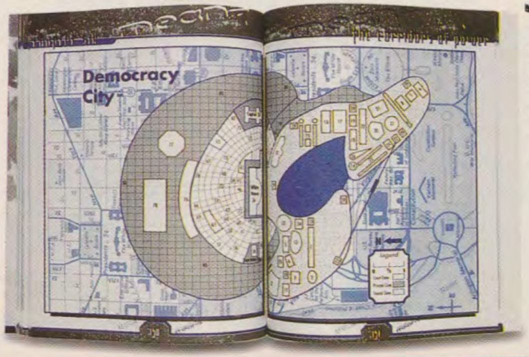
Yet, in a funny way, this is a very patriotic book. Robin Laws, the writer, keeps explaining what the original purpose of the American constitution was, and why it was a good thing. The politicians may be corrupt, but most PCs – even though they are super-powered and often mentally unstable – are expected to share the author's residual idealism. America shouldn't be like this, and maybe there is some chance that they can help to mend it.

A book about American politics might have been dry, but the hard factual information is mixed with lively first-person descriptions of people and personalities. We hear about the party leaders, the Supreme Court, the media, the issues of the day. But, in many ways, it's the give-away lines that are most telling: the fast-food restaurant whose burgers are made from recycled human excrement and doesn't know whether to keep it quiet or use it as a selling point; the fact that by 'ancient history' most Americans mean before *The Brady Bunch*.

Although the book contains a number of scenarios, players are expected to set their own agendas. Do they want to become some congressman's aide, or would they rather be underground terrorists? The referee should then devise scenarios around these long-term aims. This is a complex setting for committed roleplayers. It is also the sort of product that restores my faith in the games industry. Informative but also fun to read, it offers challenging new approaches to roleplaying that remain practical and well-explained. The author has something to say, but never gets preachy. *Ways and Means* is something very special indeed.

Andrew Rilstone

Score 8/10



A campaign supplement for *Mekton Zeta*

Mekton Wars 1: Invasion Terra

£10.99 **R Talsorian Games** ☎ **001 510 549 1373** **Out now**

on a future earth, mankind battles aliens for its very survival. should you bother to help out?

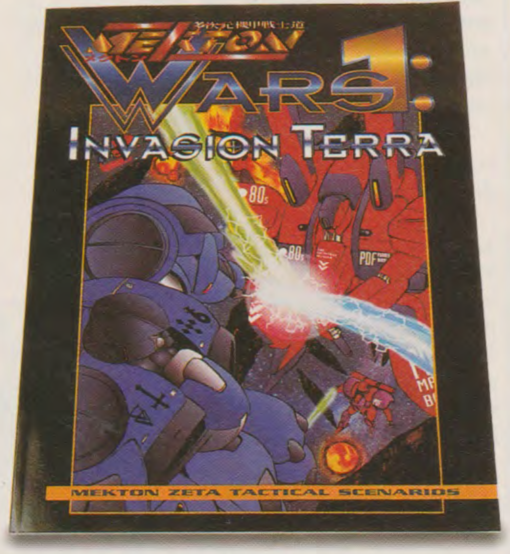
Mekton Zeta, based on Japanese animation's giant robots, is a labour of love for its creators. They have gone to great pains to keep the animé feel alive in the game, weaving in threads of love, hate, war, peace and mecha. The original *Mekton* (circa 1984) was a largely miniature-based system that has since evolved into the third, *Zeta*, incarnation. Absent here are the lumbering two-legged tanks of *BattleTech*, all armour plate and gun turrets – *Mekton*'s mecha are agile and hostile.

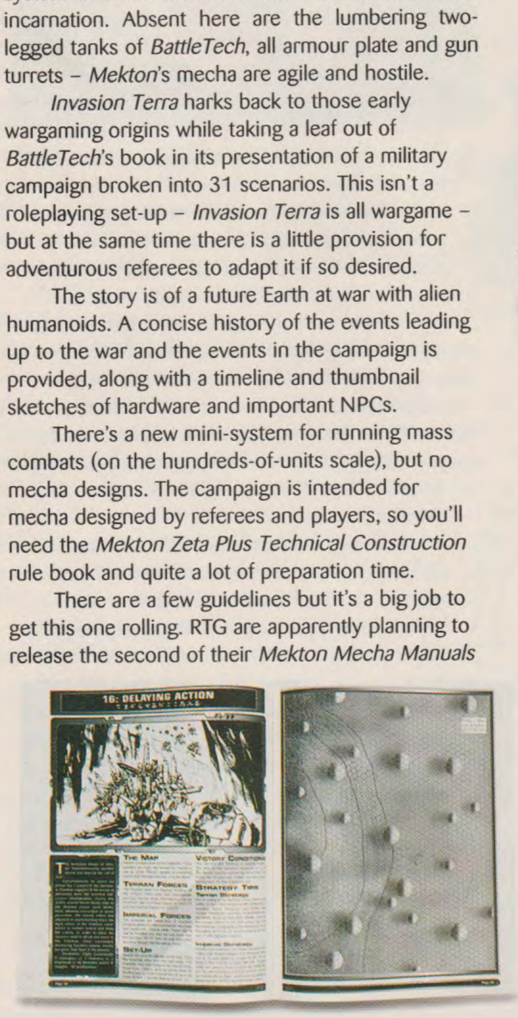
Invasion Terra harks back to those early wargaming origins while taking a leaf out of *BattleTech*'s book in its presentation of a military campaign broken into 31 scenarios. This isn't a roleplaying set-up – *Invasion Terra* is all wargame – but at the same time there is a little provision for adventurous referees to adapt it if so desired.

The story is of a future Earth at war with alien humanoids. A concise history of the events leading up to the war and the events in the campaign is provided, along with a timeline and thumbnail sketches of hardware and important NPCs.

There's a new mini-system for running mass combats (on the hundreds-of-units scale), but no mecha designs. The campaign is intended for mecha designed by referees and players, so you'll need the *Mekton Zeta Plus Technical Construction* rule book and quite a lot of preparation time.

There are a few guidelines but it's a big job to get this one rolling. RTG are apparently planning to release the second of their *Mekton Mecha Manuals* with designs exclusively relating to the *Invasion Terra* game world – why didn't just release one book combining the two?





Each scenario covers a couple of pages, with a bit of text furthering the 'story', notes on setting up your forces, tactical tips and some basic maps. *Invasion Terra*'s structure is modelled after that of a typical TV series, following the same style of story advancements, but this is better suited to roleplaying than wargaming. Roleplayers are more careful with characters they have created, while wargamers shed few tears when their faceless troops get killed. *Invasion Terra* requires 'personalities' not cyphers, and star players are usually the first to get iced in tabletop skirmishes.

Invasion Terra seems half-baked. The writing has a good true-to-genre atmosphere and contains a few in-jokes, but what could have been a great roleplaying scenario pack instead comes across as poorly put together and half-finished. Definitely the weakest in an otherwise excellent line.

Jim Swallow

Score 5/10

← consists of fierce cavalry units, and they are expansionist by nature. Binsada's high priest has recently had a vision of conquest which is currently galvanising the populace and preparing them for a jihad.

The ruler of Binsada won't be bored. The domain is surrounded by powerful awnsheghlien, and the plot hooks given at the end of the supplement provide plenty of interest. The queen's trusted lieutenant threatens to expose your true identity, there's a rival after the regency, a couple of dungeons to explore, and the small matter of leading a religious war. Players are instructed to rule Binsada with 'unshakeable confidence in the face of apparent disaster'. Sounds good to me.

Cliff Ramshaw **Score 9/10**

More Excuses to Kill Things

A collection of adventures for *Macho Women With Guns*
£7.00 **Blacksburg Tactical Research Centre** **Out now**

Macho Women With Guns isn't so much a game as an anti-game. Its rules are send-ups of other rules ('Line of sight: if it looks like you can hit it, you can hit it') and its setting is gratuitously violent and sexist. The first edition pretty much said that it was meant to be read rather than played. Some ignored this advice, so this collection of 'mildly offensive' scenarios is largely their fault…

We get two mini-adventures. One sends the PCs back in time to a fantasy kingdom full of polystyrene boulders to help Princes SheHer overthrow the evil Prince HeHim. It's a pointless journey broken up by pointless fight scenes, and thus a good simulation of a fantasy movie. The other, entitled *Indeterminator* has a noticeable plot and requires PCs to do boring, nerdish, masculine things like think. As perceptive readers may have guessed, it concerns evil androids from the future who are trying to kill all the women. The fact that these 'Indies' wear leather jackets, hats and bullwhips makes a sort of perverse sense.

Since *MWWG* is at least 80% a wargame (lots of combat system, little of anything else) we also get three 'tactical' games – that's to say hex maps (of pirate ships and a Nazi hospital) – to fight silly battles across. There's also a solo scenario based vaguely on *Aliens*. And yes, they do the joke about playing with yourself. Twice.

Andrew Rilstone **Score 7/10**

Dreamtime

A supplement for *CORPS*
£6.95 Blacksburg Tactical Research Centre Out now

DREAMTIME
BTRC

Dreamtime provides an aboriginal setting for BTRC's *CORPS* (the Complete Omniversal RolePlaying System – hello *GURPS*). Characters are hunter gatherers without money or literacy. Their tools are made from stone, bone, animal hides and the like. They are in touch with the spirits of nature, and call upon them for magical aid.

The supplement describes the creation of characters, their semi-nomadic society, the surrounding flora and fauna, and the more important spirits. Pity there are no contents or index pages.

The background is absolutely fascinating, as far as I'm aware completely unique in roleplaying, and with artwork of a naivety and power that fits perfectly. It's a primitive society, with only the most basic of magic items (herbs and enchanted stones), so many players will miss their traditional motivations for adventuring. This is definitely one for the more thoughtful, experimental of groups. The problem is exacerbated by the supplement's occasional vagueness, which becomes most apparent in the sample adventure (the adventure also suffers from being far too linear). Only referees prepared to work hard and put in plenty of imagination need apply. Those that do will discover something rare and thought-provoking.

Cliff Ramshaw **Score 8/10**

Something Wild

An adventure for *AD&D*
£7.99 TSR ☎ 01223 212517 Out now

PLANESCAPE
SOMETHING WILD

Bad dreams, street battles and mass nudity are tearing Sigil apart, and players are drawn into conflict with a once-imprisoned god who has escaped into a collective nightmare.

A long and tricky bash, *Something Wild* coughs up enough connected and comprehensible clues to keep the players on track yet maintains the overall mystery. Drawing on some of the newer planes and dropping big hints about the next phase of the Blood War, it's a fresh but complex scenario that makes vast demands on both referees and players. The *Planescape* boxed set is all you really *need* to run

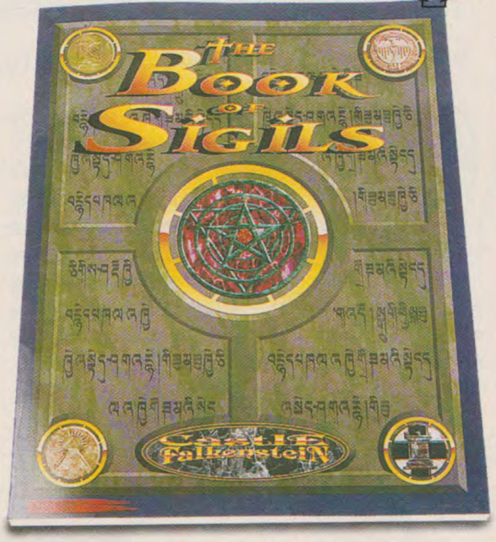
➔

A supplement for *Castle Falkenstein*

The Book Of Sigils

£9.99 R Talsorian Games ☎ 001 510 549 1373 Out now

Magick is power, but if you play with fire...



One of the key weaknesses of *Castle Falkenstein* is its limited options for wizard characters. With 30 new sorcerous orders, 36 new lore books and expanded rules on casting and spell requirements, *The Book of Sigils* attempts to remedy the situation. It presents players with a host of new possibilities – from a 'David Copperfield' able to blur the line between theatrics and true magick to a sorcerous Sherlock Holmes.

It takes the form of the diary of Anthony Saville, a sorcerer who, through an amazing run of bad luck, is dubbed a criminal and hunted across the globe. *The Book of Sigils* is easily read – it's a good tale – and referees can view life in the *Castle Falkenstein* world from the scenes that unfold. Unfortunately, important rules and directions are lost in the text and, without an index for every rule, you either have to soak the pages in highlighter or commit all 128 to memory.

THE STEPS OF THE SUN
BOOK OF SIGILS
BOOK OF SIGILS

The majority of guidelines, expanded orders and tables, however, are thankfully headed and isolated from the narrative. Detailing casting penalties and bonuses, policing within the magick-using community, and allies and opponents of each of the orders, the material is highly useful – especially the passages on order hierarchy, membership rites and the hazards of multi-order membership.

The true strength of the supplement, though, is its expansion of sorcerous orders. *The Book of Sigils* includes orders from all over the world, practising everything from Voudon to Fakir magick, and opens their membership to characters. Backgrounds and goals are explained, along with details on the lore the orders possess.

BOOK OF SIGILS
BOOK OF SIGILS

In true *Castle Falkenstein* style, only basic spell descriptions are given. The exact strengths are left for the referee to decide, based on the abilities and intentions of the caster. If these do not meet your expectations, you can create your own spells and orders using the guidelines provided.

The absence of a comprehensive index makes reference to particular rules slow, to say the least, and, once read, wading through the narrative becomes an annoyance. A strict 'story-then-rules' layout would have been a better idea.

That said, *The Book of Sigils* is an essential purchase for any *Castle Falkenstein* referee, since it contains fundamental expansions to the game and is also a useful guide to what to expect if the characters decide to roam outside of New Europa.

David S Cornford

Score 8/10

A sourcebook for *GURPS*

Places of Mystery

£11.95 Steve Jackson Games ☎ 001 512 447 7866 Out now

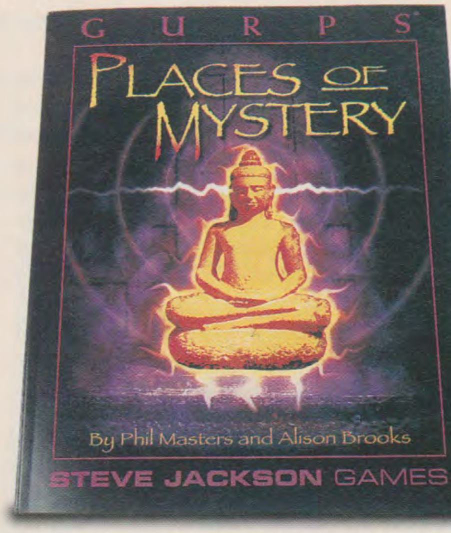
Yep, the world is indeed a strange place — but we already knew that...

This overview of some of the world's wonders, both real and legendary, accentuates their potential as source material. As an introduction to some strange locations, it's an immediately attractive trigger for the imagination. But its scope is too great. While it may make interesting reading for a referee whose campaign world is in the embryonic stage, it won't take anybody much further. It is not a scholarly work – its self-confessed factual unreliability and lack of attention to detail ultimately limit its usefulness.

There is a disclaimer in the introduction to the effect that the research is only as thorough as 'time and resources permitted'. We're asked not to expect accuracy in the descriptions of the places covered, nor in the explanations advanced for their appearance, nor even in the maps or indecipherable illustrations that are there to make this book easy to dip in and out of. This means that wherever the book is obviously inaccurate, you have no recourse to complaint, which is frustrating and off-putting. The Canary Islands are described as 'lush and fertile' because they're volcanic, which is like describing 'drought-stricken' Yorkshire as 'arid'.

There is a good chapter on Atlantis, a simplistic one on stone circles and allegedly related phenomena, and then the book is divided geographically, with chapters on various areas where places of mystery are part of every day life – places such as Britain, the Mediterranean and 'Darkest' Africa (which, according to this book, extends from the Atlas mountains all the way down to Zimbabwe, leaving only the RSA and Uganda to comprise, presumably, 'Lighter' Africa).

Apart from its occasional irreverent joke at our ancestors' expense, *Places of Mystery*'s lack of depth makes it read like a children's book of amazing places. It's littered with sidebars that illustrate how referees might work the information into their campaigns and, more importantly, justify the publication of an inadequately researched piece of work under the guise of source material for roleplayers. And any referee worth his or her salt will find some of the pointers a touch patronising.



8+THE MEDITERRANEAN

Troy

Troy: The Legend

Homer's Troy

Places of Mystery is half-arsed. Where it does introduce something interesting it doesn't offer enough auxiliary information to follow through (although there is a short bibliography for further research). You could use some of these locations in fantasy settings, as well as their more obvious applications to historical or time-travel campaigns, but you'll need more than this book can provide.

Places of Mystery is a source of inspiration for referees of any system, with some fascinating 'facts', but it just doesn't go far enough. There are plenty of better 'mysterious places' books on the market and you're smart enough to work out for yourselves how to incorporate the information they contain into your games.

Jonathan Palmer

Score 4/10

the adventure, but *Planes Of Conflict, Planescape Monstrous Compendium Appendix, In The Cage: A Guide to Sigil, The Factol's Manifesto* and *Ravenloft: The Nightmare Lands are recommended.*

However, these rules and references are beautifully intertwined, with each (non-linear) encounter elegantly limited so the party cannot get ahead of themselves and screw up the scenario. This subtly relies on player's maintaining concentration and making the right calls. The risk is that players will place undue emphasis on the window dressing rather than the clues. While mechanisms are provided for referees to fire-fight current problems, a critical mass of misunderstanding could easily develop, skewing the players' view of both their immediate and overall goals.

Something Wild bristles impressively with ambition, subtly and guile. Yet while it makes an entertaining read, playing the scenario can prove too taxing to be fun.

Trenton Webb Score 6/10

Fantasy General

A fantasy wargame for the PC
£39.99 Mindscape ☎01444 246333
Out now

Fantasy General is a hex-based large-scale wargame set in a fantasy world. You choose a character from the four on offer, each having certain advantages, such as access to special types of units or spells. You then play a campaign in which you fight across five continents, freeing them from the rule of an evil warlord. There are a number of multiplayer options, including play-by-e-mail.

It's a deceptively simple game that's easy to get into but harder to win. There's a wide variety of units on offer, and the choice of characters makes a significant difference. What let's it down is the presentation. The graphics are of a tacky 'high fantasy' style, and the sound, while slightly better, isn't inspiring.

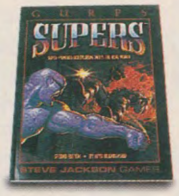
Fantasy General is good but not great – you can happily while away a few hours with it but it's unlikely to keep you up 'till three in the morning for 'one more go'.

Andy Butcher Score 7/10

150 Gold
6th Sergeant (15)
Cavalry

GURPS Supers 2nd Edition

A supplement for *GURPS*
£11.95 Steve Jackson Games
☎001 512 447 7866 Out now



GURPS Supers is a rules supplement dealing with super-powered characters in a modern-day setting. The 132-page book contains all the necessary rules to create *GURPS* superheroes ranging in power from Marvel's Iron Fist to Alan Moore's Dr Manhattan. Be warned that most of the information here is only useful with the *GURPS* basic system. Superhero games tend to be very rules-heavy, and what you get here is no exception, making it inextricably linked with the *GURPS* rules.

It also contains suggestions for running your own superhero campaign and a detailed, if rather dull, background setting with the UN controlling most superheroes – fine if you want to recreate a Saturday afternoon TV show, but not so great for a more fantastic, underground campaign of the *Watchmen* variety.

So, it's a competent enough set of rules – and one that's well presented – but *GURPS Supers* is not exactly compulsive playing material.

Steve Faragher Score 6/10

The Sword of Roele

An adventure for the *AD&D Birthright* campaign
£7.99 TSR ☎01223 212517 Out now

It's a convoluted one, this. The Three Brother Mages, implacable enemies of the Chimera, have put it about that they know the whereabouts of the famed Sword of Roele and that they're out to get it. They're actually after something quite different, but they'll happily send the adventurers off on a quest to the claimed location of the sword to unearth what they really want. (In fact, the sword lies deep and secure within the Gorgon's hoard.) The Chimera, keen to keep an eye on the maverick wizards, also wants the adventurers to search for the sword so she can find out what the Brothers are really after. But it's even more complicated than that, because the sword isn't really in the Gorgon's hoard at all – it has been placed where the Brothers pretend it is by a mischievous third party.

The adventure takes place in a tomb for paladins of the ancient Order of

➔

A collectable card game

Fantasy Adventures

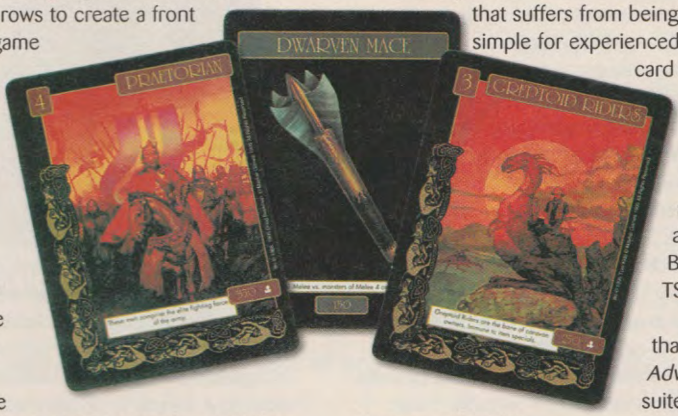
100-card Starter Deck £10.95 15-card Booster Pack £2
Mayfair Games ☎ 001 708 647 9650 Out now

Dungeon bashing is reborn in Mayfair's latest card game...

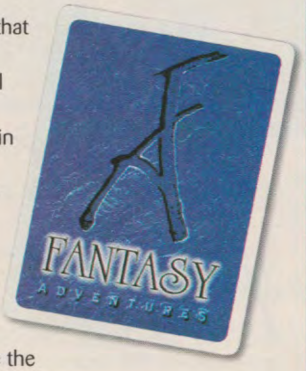
Over the last year or so the lines between roleplaying, board and card games have begun to blur as designers incorporate different elements into their games. *Fantasy Adventures* takes the oldest idea in roleplaying – a party of adventurers searching for treasure and monsters to kill – and translates it into collectable card game form.

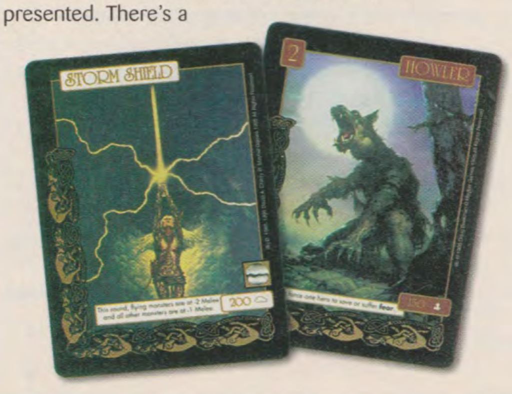
Each player has two decks, a Hero deck and an Encounter deck. The Hero deck contains a selection of… well, hero cards, while the Encounter deck has a mix of spell and item cards for your heroes to use, as well as monster and trap cards to make life difficult for the the other players.

You begin by drawing eight hero cards, which are arranged in two rows to create a front and rear rank. The game proceeds in turns, with each player attempting to kill his opponents' heroes with monster and trap cards, while equipping his party with spells and new items. Six-sided dice are used to resolve most combats and other actions. All the cards in the game have a Gold Piece value, and the winner is the player whose party has the highest GP value after four complete turns.



The rules are well written and clearly presented. There's a separate Help Book that includes a detailed sample game and full glossary, although neither it nor the main rule book has an index. The cards are generally clear and easy to understand, if a little on the thin side, and have variously coloured backs to differentiate the Hero and Encounter decks.





Fantasy Adventures is a well designed game that suffers from being perhaps too simple for experienced gamers. The card artwork also lets the side down, being a mish-mash of 'high' fantasy styles, mainly along the familiar Boris Vallejo and TSR lines.

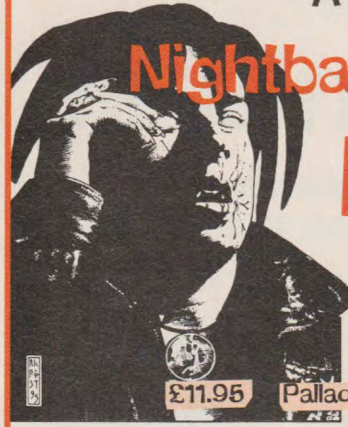
Having said that, *Fantasy Adventures* is well suited to younger players, and could serve as a useful introduction to the world of gaming in general. There's certainly some potential for story telling (as demonstrated by the example game outlined in the rules) and even a limited form of roleplaying. To top it all off, the game is fully playable with nothing more than Starter Decks, and two players can even share a single Starter Deck and still have a fun game.

Not outstanding, then, but simple to play and fun nonetheless. If you've got a younger sibling who's expressed an interest in these 'strange games' that you play, you could do worse than sit down and play this with them for a while…

Andy Butcher

Score 6/10

A *Nightbane* supplement



Nightbane World Book One: Between the Shadows

£11.95 Palladium Books ☎ 001 313 946 2900 Out now

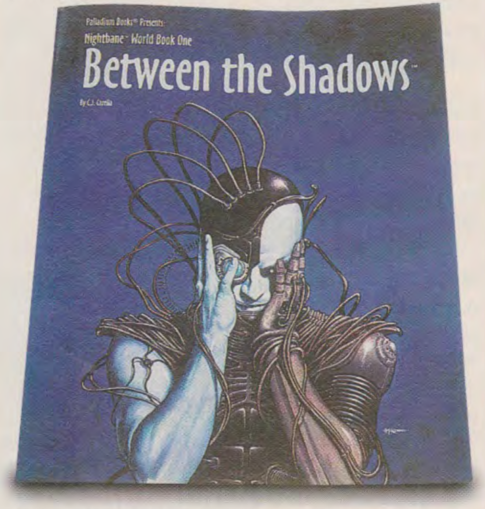
Palladium gets scary with the first supplement for its recently re-named horror RPG.

Nightbane was originally called *Nightspawn*, but Palladium renamed it to avoid conflict with Todd McFarlane's best-selling comic *Spawn*. The second printing of the main rule book, due in July, will carry the new name.

The world has been secretly taken over by Nightlords, evil shapeshifters from another dimension who have infiltrated governments by assuming the likenesses of world leaders. Some humans have been transformed into creatures akin to those of Clive Barker's *Nightbreed*. These Nightbane are feared as monsters by most normal humans and blamed by the alien infiltrators for the world's ills. In fact, they are among the few with the powers to unmask and combat the Nightlords.

Between the Shadows expands on three game elements tenuously linked by the term 'shadows'. The Spook Squad is a shadowy government agency, consisting mainly of normal humans, that fights the Nightlords. The information on its methods, factions and secret agendas is excellent – great for those who prefer playing humans to Nightbane, and for referees wanting extra threats for Nightbane groups.

The other shadowy subjects are the Astral Plane and the Dreamstream – alternate worlds where those with the right psychic or magical abilities can fight the Nightlords or try to escape them. Many RPGs use the concept of an Astral Plane; a few have covered dream realms. This book deals with them at least as well as any. They are straightforward to use yet extremely versatile, allowing a referee to encapsulate whatever horror elements he wants in a pocket domain and players to create personal havens for their characters. The examples have great potential. Fancy gambling away your psychic energy at The Casino of the Damned, where losers become property of the house?



Palladium Books® Presents:
Nightbane™ World Book One
Between the Shadows™
By C.J. Carella

It's hard to fault *Between the Shadows*. It lacks an index, it's US-orientated and the campaign ideas are a little bland. But so what? The 'flavour text' stories will inspire you for years. Production quality is high, with some excellent artwork. There are plenty of conversion notes and crossover suggestions for using *Nightbane* with other Palladium systems, and it's well-suited for importing ideas from other horror games. Great stuff.

Lucya Szachnowski

Score 8/10

← the Sun. Grave robbing a lawful-good tomb is ordinarily a pretty dull experience, so the designers have come up with another plot twist: the architect hired by the priests of the Order was actually a necromancer in disguise. He intended to return from the dead as a lich and use the tomb himself. (Casting detect evil on the builder of the resting place for all their souls must have seemed like such a chore to the commissioning priests.) Consequently, the tomb boasts plenty of deadly traps and not a few undead.

It's not only convoluted, it's confusing and doesn't really hang together. Bit of a disappointment.

Cliff Ramshaw **Score 4/10**

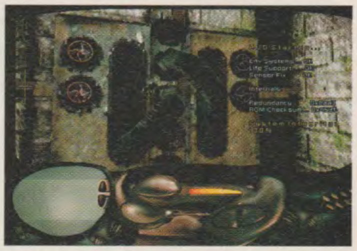
Azrael's Tear

An adventure game for the PC
£44.99 Mindscape
☎ 01444 246333 Out now

One of the most interesting computer games in some time, *Azrael's Tear* casts you as a high-tech thief of the near future. Discovering that a competitor has apparently found the resting place of the Holy Grail, you decide to follow him.

Play begins with you entering the underground complex that has supposedly housed the Grail for eight centuries. As you explore via a stunning first-person 3D view, you realise that it's far from deserted. The Grail's powers have kept its guardian knights alive all this time…

Azrael's Tear has a great deal going for it. Sound and graphics are excellent, and the temple itself is one of the most cunningly designed locations ever seen in a computer game. The story that gradually unfolds is imaginative and absorbing.



The only real problem is the game's difficulty. It drops you in the thick of things, and leaves you pretty much to your own devices. This wouldn't be so bad, but most of the challenges are life or death situations, and you're never quite sure if you've completed a puzzle.

If you take the time to get into it, though, *Azrael's Tear* is atmospheric and extremely satisfying.

Andy Butcher **Score 7/10**

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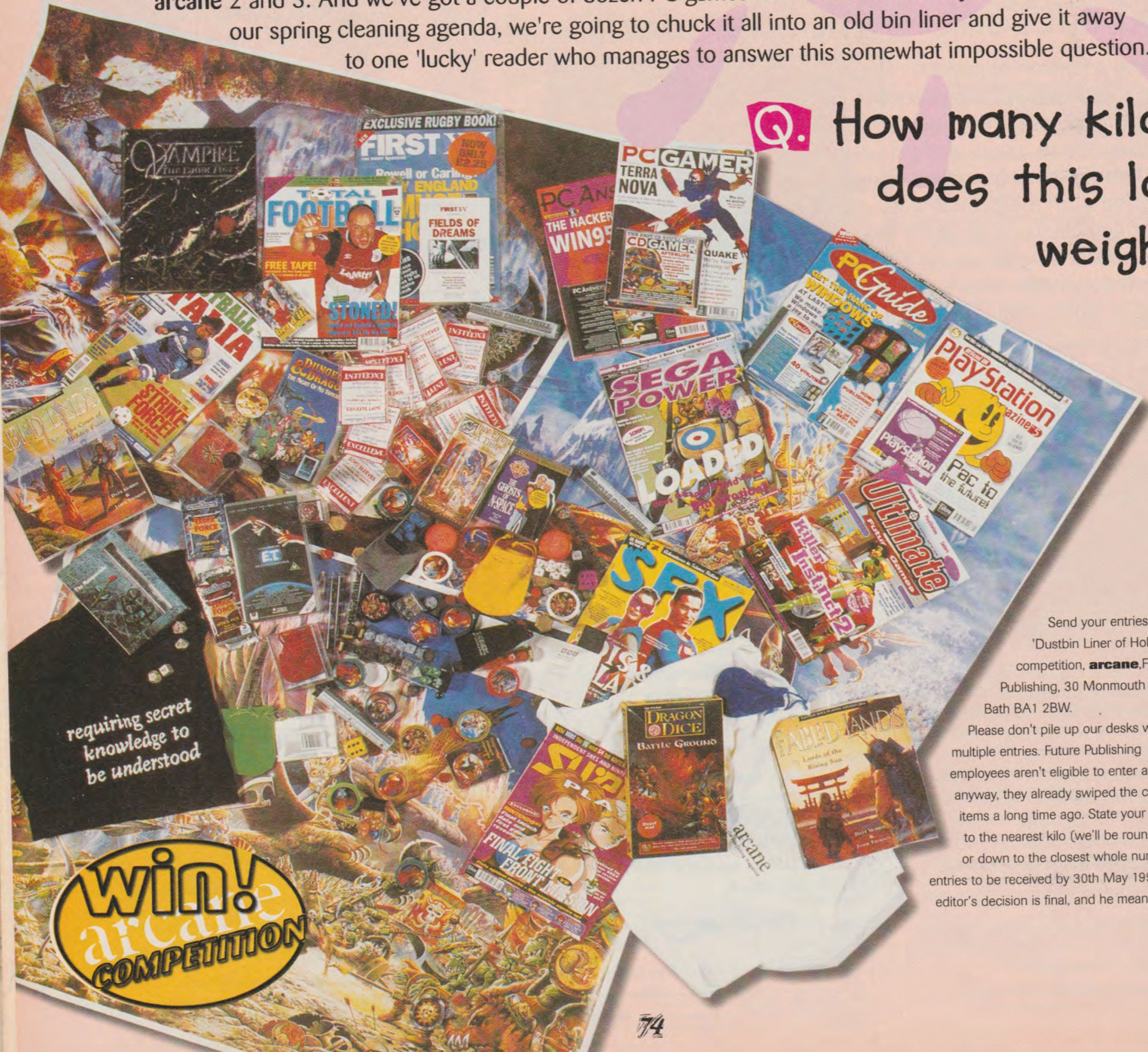
The Dustbin Liner of Holding

It's been six months since **arcane** was launched and in that time we've managed to accumulate an awful lot of useless rubbish around the office. As well as what you can see here, we've found spare copies of FASA's **Virtual Realities 2.0** and **Awakenings: New Magic in 2057**, the sourcebooks for **Shadowrun** reviewed in **arcane** 2 and 3. And we've got a couple of dozen PC games we found under Andy's desk. So, as part of our spring cleaning agenda, we're going to chuck it all into an old bin liner and give it away to one 'lucky' reader who manages to answer this somewhat impossible question...



Q. How many kilos does this lot weigh?

Send your entries to:
'Dustbin Liner of Holding' competition, **arcane**, Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW.

Please don't pile up our desks with multiple entries. Future Publishing employees aren't eligible to enter and anyway, they already swiped the choice items a long time ago. State your answer to the nearest kilo (we'll be rounding up or down to the closest whole number). All entries to be received by 30th May 1996. The editor's decision is final, and he means it.

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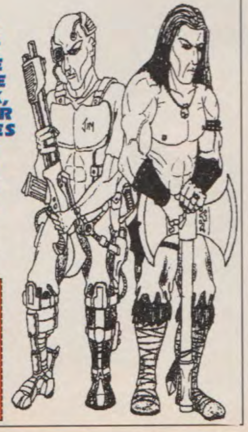

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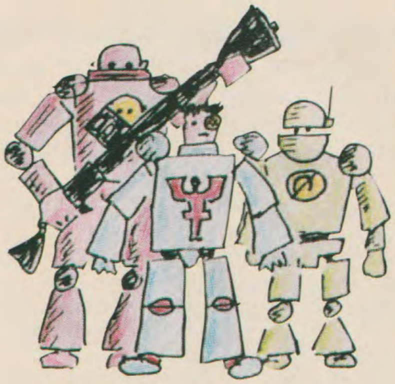

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Gwendalyn, Female Cleric

A fully-clothed, non-exaggerated female figure! Good heavens, what are they thinking of? Gwendalyn (02035, around 32mm high) is nonetheless a very attractive girl whose definitely feminine figure is still clear through the convincing draping of her sensible yet fetching clothing. Fine detail has been applied, and believable accessories too. Competent casting finishes off this very desirable miniature. What more can I say? I like this one a lot.

Reaper Miniatures
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Saracen Assassins

These guys (8305, around 32mm high) are fairly good – not brilliantly detailed, but nice and chunky. The casting could have been a lot better, but the smooth surfaces make cleaning relatively easy, and let's not complain while the very reasonable pricing continues. At last we see an example of a slow-to-return trend in figure design: animated poses. Could be that standards are on the up again – joy and jubilation.

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Yes, folks, it's another diorama from the Art Nouveau school of figure design. Love it or hate it, at least these guys are consistent. Personally, I feel the figures lack the definition I look for, but they are undoubtedly elegantly idealised, if minimalist. This set (MV375, 37mm high on a 60x43mm base) depicts Mr Bombadil and a few others I'm sure you'll recognise. A must for Tolkien fans.

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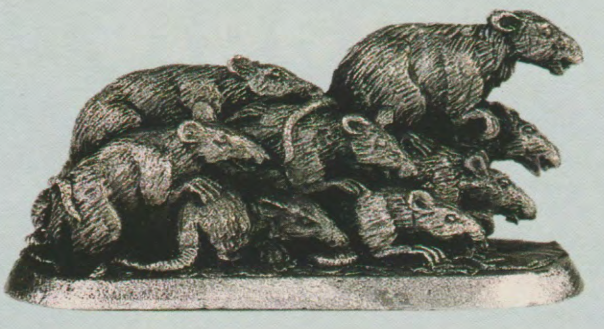

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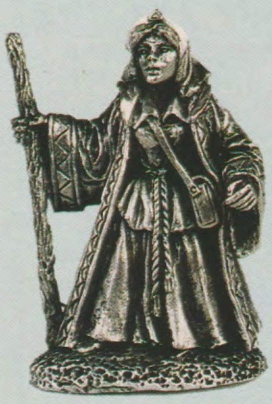

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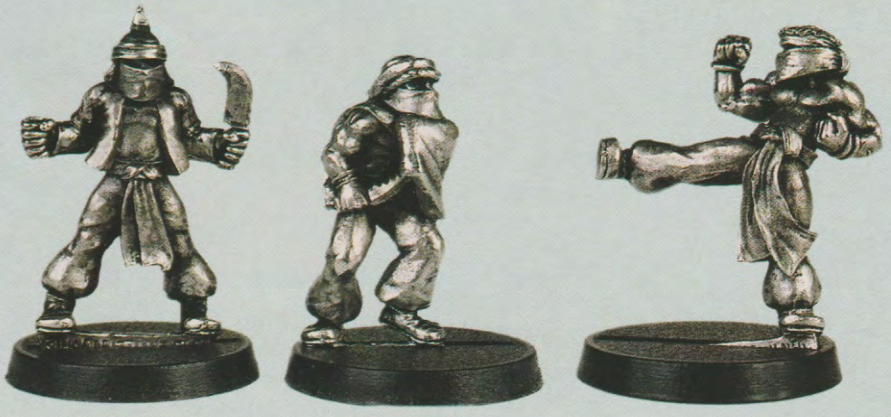

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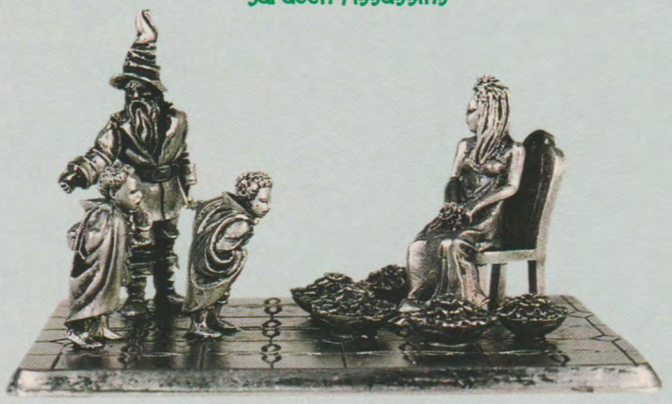

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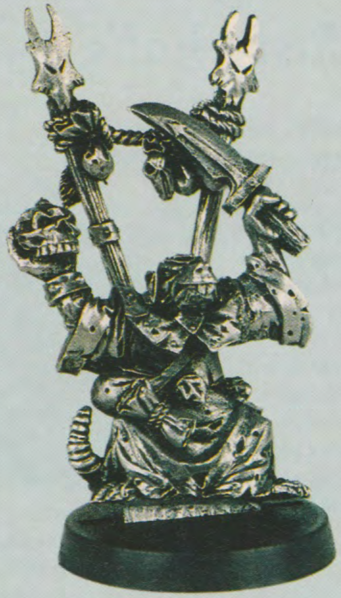
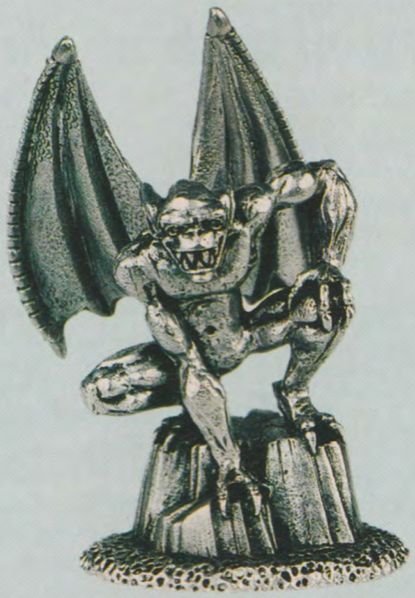


Skaven Warlocks



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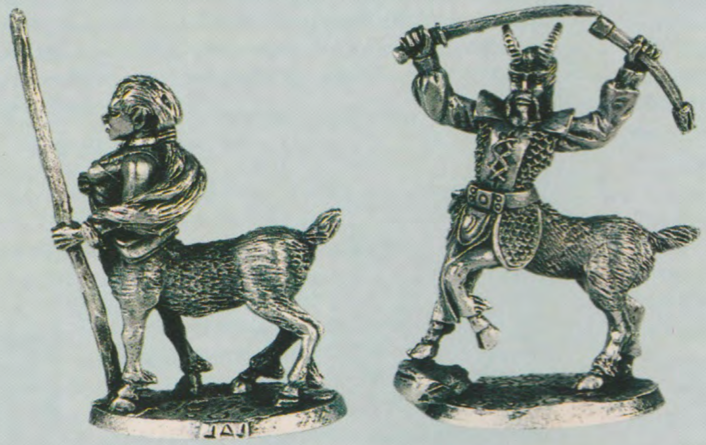

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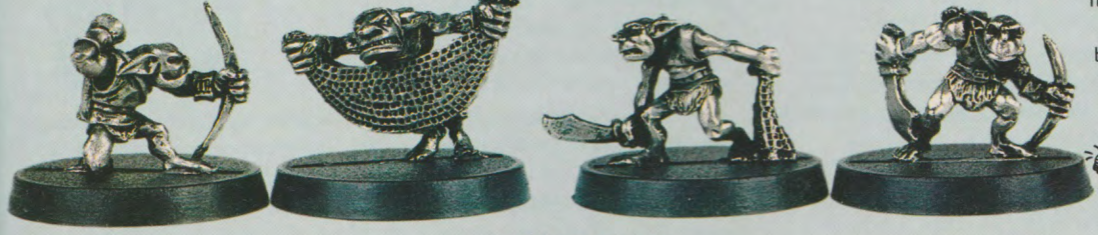

Nightling Scouts

Skaven Warlocks

This single figure (40mm high) belies the title on the packaging somewhat, and the totem arrangement apparently designed to fit on the ratman's back simply won't do so without a lot of fiddling... *but* this one is cheap by comparison. The usual chunky detail and above-average standard of casting (practically no cleaning required) make this figure quite desirable, even if his bottom does stick out too far for the totem thingy to fit well.

Games Workshop
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Gargoyle

Hold on, don't get too excited – it's okay but it's not great. The gargoyle (02039, 37mm high) is a little too large to stick on a 25mm-scale castle, but as a statue or even a desk ornament it's worth getting. I'd prefer to see more facial detail, and more convincing wings, but then I don't like pseudo-scary. The wings fit neatly into their appointed place, and the whole is tidily cast.

Reaper Miniatures
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Free League Bariaur (for *Planescape*)

Centaur types seemingly based on deer, these two (11-622, 38mm) are really quite imaginatively done, at least design-wise. Unfortunately, the casting is a bit naff which, when combined with intricate design, makes flash removal somewhat tough. The female's face in particular is lovely, in fact the high point of what is generally very good sculpting. Not useful in every scenario perhaps, but lovely anyway – a pretty addition to any collection.

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Nightling Scouts

Nasty little snivelling wretches... perfect. Four skinny runts (6101, 20mm high): one has a big net, one has a bow and arrow, one has a bow and arrow and a sword (he must be important) and one has a sword, a net, and a dog collar. Reasonable detail and okay casting combine well with beautifully stupid, pathetic faces. They're great, if not the most original things in the world. Oh yes, and cheap too.

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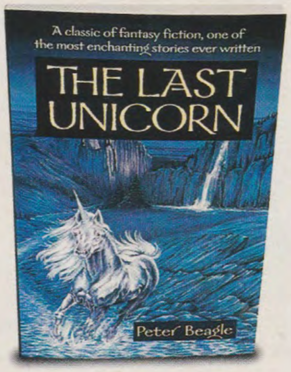
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With a wonderfully delicate touch the author explores the classic fantasy themes of beauty and immortality, of corruption's ubiquity in all human affairs, of both the illusionary magic that fools those unwilling to see clearly and the true, heart-felt magic that effects great changes. It's about the necessity to love despite the foreknowledge of loss, about the differences between seeming and being and the interplay of the two.

> "But the harpy lifted her wings, and the four sides of the cage fell away and down, like the petals of some great flower waking at night. And out of the wreckage the harpy bloomed, terrible and free, screaming, her hair swinging like a sword."

The style is richly, fantastically poetic; objects and perceptions continually transform under the influence of magical figures of speech, making images that are mystical without being vague, yet strangely, beautifully right. In places the style modulates to comedy – there's a hero who can't win his beloved's heart despite bringing her the heads of five dragons – or to a playful self-consciousness with the characters becoming aware of their presence in a fairy tale, or to the narrative subverting fantasy clichés to renew them and make them fantastic again.

The Last Unicorn was originally published in 1968 and subsequently made into an animated film – this latest edition gives a new generation of readers the chance to let a little beauty into their lives. Don't miss it.

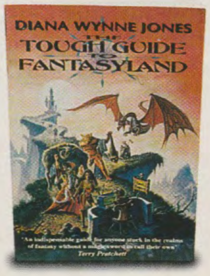
Cliff Ramshaw

Score 10/10

The Tough Guide to Fantasyland

by Diana Wynne Jones Published by Vista
Paperback £4.99 Out now

A *Lonely Planet* guide for *D&D*, this humourous A–Z is a good reference for anyone involved in a fantasy campaign – not as a sourcebook for ideas, but as a reminder to avoid the trite, and because it might make you laugh.



Essentially, it's a piss-take of the hackneyed stereotypes so prevalent in the genre, and an observation that most fantasy worlds are inadequately fleshed out. Each page has a side-panel of impenetrable icons, as any tourist guide should, but the author has neglected to include a key – probably all part of the joke. Also, there's a map, inadequately detailed, of course.

> "Unicorns are exceedingly rare. Each one you meet will tell you that it is the last one."

Although there are some audible chuckles to be had, the *Guide* is not a side-splitter (unlike Henry Root's *World of Knowledge*, to which it owes a considerable debt), but it is welcome fillip to those who feel that Fantasyland has become a little predictable. For a fiver, this book is recommended.

Jonathan Palmer **Score 7/10**

* * *

Star Beast

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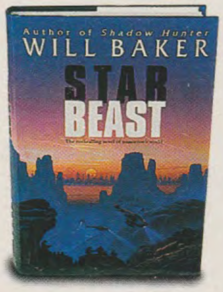
This is an engaging and often haunting science-fantasy piece set in the same post-apocalyptic world of Baker's debut novel *Shadow Hunter*. Humans have laid waste to much of the Earth and retreated into huge hive-like cities. Outside, in the wastelands, dwell the Pobla – hairy, primitive hybrids who barely scratch out an existence. Both peoples despise, fear and shun the other.



Events revolve around Ronald, a schizoid human boy who was'rescued' from the wasteland, and Tima, a Pobla female taken captive with him.

> "Do not try to hasten the river of death."

They form a special psychic and physical bond, which, as two scientists discover, appears to offer humanity and Pobla alike a last chance. We follow their flight as certain human and Pobla factions, sensing their importance, seek either to control or get rid of them.

Starbeast is long and intricate, and has a great many characters, but Baker's grip on an absorbing story is sure. His greatest achievement is the Pobla. In beautiful detail he describes their desolate world, eerie lives and customs. These chapters are quite spellbinding.

In comparison, the world of the humans is paler and less interesting; so much so that it seems merely a vehicle for the intrigue from which the two heroes must escape. This is a shame, because this is why, for me, the book falls slightly short of its possibilities.

Gideon Kibblewhite **Score 8/10**

* * *

Shadowrun: Black Madonna

by Carl Sargent & Marc Gascoigne Published by ROC
Paperback £3.50 Out now

Sargent and Gascoigne return to their familiar characters – Sutherland, Serrin and Geraint – in their third and most ambitious *Shadowrun* novel. As with their previous books, *Black Madonna* is a cut above the *Shadowrun* novels from other authors in terms of its characters. But it also suffers from the overly intricate plotting of the earlier stories.

> "Did you know, there were people dumb enough to pass up on the dessert trolley on the Titanic?"

However, the events described have great implications for the world of *Shadowrun*, marking perhaps the single largest change since the game was first published. For this reason alone, it's required reading for any referees trying to keep up with 'current events' in FASA's time-line.

Andy Butcher **Score 6/10**

* * *

The Amazing Spider-Man: Chance Encounter

by Todd McFarlane Published by Boxtree
Graphic novel £8.99 Out now

Featuring the early work of comic artist/writer Todd McFarlane, *Chance Encounters* is a collection of two stories that pit the webslinger against the bat-mutant Morbius in the 1971 tale *Sub City* and the rich supervillain Chance in 1987's *Chance Encounters*. It's classic wall-crawling stuff, complete with comic Thwaps and Thunks.

The stories themselves are fairly unremarkable, but Spidey fans will enjoy the cosy familiarity of Peter Parker's marriage to Mary Jane, the black spider costume and the brief appearance of Venom. The collection, however, is mainly notable as a showcase of McFarlane's early artistry, exhibiting the seeds of a visual style that catapulted the celebrated *Spawn* comic into the best-seller list. You can't help feeling that a measly two tales isn't much for your £8.99, so many of us are going to feel a bit ripped-off, but the hardcore fans out there certainly won't be disappointed with the quality of the stories.

> "I'd take the bus like a normal person, instead of saving a few nickels by going everywhere as The Amazing Spider-Man..."

Dean Evans **Score 7/10**

The Rod of Seven Parts

by Douglas Niles Published by TSR Hardback
£12.50 Out now

The Rod Of Seven Parts doesn't even pretend to be a 'proper' book; glibly ignoring such trifling conventions as characterisation, pacing and structure. It's a work of reportage that (almost too) accurately recreates the feel of an actual game in play which – as a teaser for the forthcoming campaign based on the 'legendary' artifact – is exactly what it should be.

The story starts with a furious duel between a Wind Duke and Lycosyd, and from that moment on, the pace is unrelenting. This speed of delivery helps paper over a few cracks. The characters are functional class/race archetypes, while their dialogue has the air of 'real' conversations culled from players under pressure, rather than being considered character-developing speech. The plot pushes everything on at such a rate that many questions are left unanswered.

The resolution of cliffhangers is often illogical and regularly beyond the control of the central cast. All their escapes seem plausible at first, but on reflection are increasingly dissatisfying. Yet somehow the sensation of gamers at play surfaces, because when logic falls foul of fun, the characters (players?) are winging it. Such 'amateurish' elements should both damn the book to the same plane of hell as the main villain Miska; but don't.

> "When all seven parts are brought into proper conjunction it is an artifact of absolute, ultimate law. As such I shall wield it to drive chaos into abeyance."

The mix of monsters is right, escalating from ogres through to top-notch tannari. The setting continually changes, moving swiftly from the familiar dungeon environment through city streets to the planes of Pandemonium. There are big heroes and big villains. And you get to meet and fight them both.

The flaws restrict rather than cripple *The Rod Of Seven Parts,* (even though the way it handles laws regarding alignment is extremely annoying). Aimed at a hard-core *D&D* audience, it's an enjoyable tale told with enough raw enthusiasm to maintain the 'live and direct from the tabletop' feel. If your gaming palette has become jaded of late, it's an ideal tonic.

Trenton Webb

Score 7/10

Cthulhu 2000

Edited by Jim Turner Published by Arkham House Hardback £18.50 Out now

Despite the misleading title, the stories in this Lovecraft-inspired anthology are set during the 20th rather than 21st century. Had you come to this collection of works expecting futuristic horror, you'd be disappointed. Read it, however, and this irritation will flee, for the writing in the book's 400-odd pages represents the very best in modern Mythos prose.

There are 18 tales here, by authors as diverse as TED Klein and cyberpunk guru Bruce Sterling. The range is equally broad, from traditional Lovecraft to more radical story-telling forms.

A couple of these stories have been reprinted from an earlier Arkham House publication (*New Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos,* 1980 – published in the UK by Grafton, 1988) but, despite this, *Cthulhu 2000* is a strong collection with plenty of inspiration for modern *Call of Cthulhu* campaigns. And beside, it's a damn fine read.

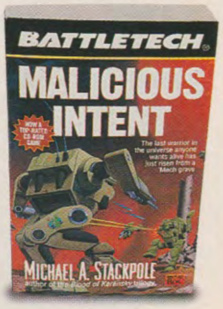
"They clutched triple-sealed spells that could open, for a few micro-seconds, the portal between universes."

Paul Pettengale **Score 8/10**

* * *

Battletech: Malicious Intent

by Michael A Stackpole Published by ROC Paperback £3.50 Out now



The Loremaster Supreme returns in this episode of the saga of the Inner Sphere. Stackpole's nine other books make him the series' best-seller, and he's back with a boom after his stint on the *Star Wars X-Wing* novels. Unlike many *BattleTech* novels, with their umbrella plots stretched thinly over a handful of Mech battles, Stackpole goes for the political angle in his stories with gusto. With the Inner Sphere's restless Houses, the factionalism within the Comstar organisation and the feuding Clans, he's got plenty of material. There are a few neatly paced fights in the book (and not all of them with Mechs), but they take a back seat to the political power plays; this is the Machiavellian end of the *BattleTech* world. The only major gripe is its shifting spotlight. The cover and the first few chapters give the impression that the book will follow one particular character's arc, but he's soon gone and our attention is focused elsewhere on almost completely unrelated events. It seems Stackpole had a list of all the important political happenings in 3058 and has shoe-horned them all into this book. What you get is a ringside seat at the return from the dead of the Wolf Clan, the Jade Falcon Clan's invasion toward Tharkad, ComStar's loss of Terra, the start of a grand House-wide alliance, and some interesting hints about future events, including a Clan/House pact cemented by lust and mutual interest. Epic.

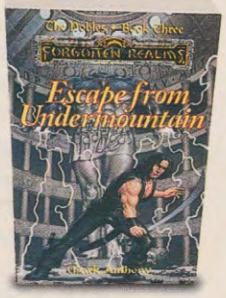
"The rest are all dead, now the Wolves belong to me."

James Swallow **Score 7/10**

* * *

Escape from Undermountain

by Mark Anthony Published by TSR Paperback £4.99 Out now



This is real *Dungeons & Dragons*; a half-orc half-witch hero has a 48-hour do-or-die quest to rescue a nobleman from a subterranean labyrinth containing countless monsters. He has a small golden box from which a magical gate will appear to transport him and his ward out of Undermountain in their moment of need. Something inevitably has to go wrong.

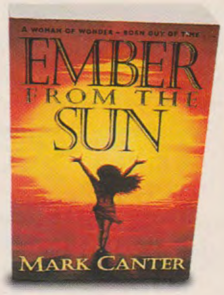
"Webs of Deceit."

Mark Anthony writes to formula and what little plot there is he spells out early. That said, *Escape* is engaging and witty, so novices may find this *Forgotten Realms* novel a good introduction to the concepts of fantasy roleplaying.

Jonathan Palmer **Score 6/10**

Ember from the Sun

by Mark Canter Published by New English Library
Paperback £5.99 Out now



Yute Nahadeh finds the frozen body of a Neanderthal woman in an ice cave and, while chopping her up in the interests of science, discovers a foetus, whips it out and sticks it in a 20th century surrogate mother who gives birth to Ember, a genuine Neanderthal.

Canter's first novel is a good read. Despite many unnecessary plot distractions, its rigidly linear style, and a long boring bit in the middle, it's a vehicle for interesting theories about what happened to the Neanderthal tribes. Spiced up with intriguing Native American folklore and flash-backs to A Long Time Ago, it meanders pleasingly towards what should be a fascinating denouement. Ember tries to resurrect the rest of her tribe – who put themselves into deep freeze in a large cave by eating the right kind of berries – but now the inevitable evil mining company is about to cock things up.

"Neanderthals, with their larger brain size and massive brawn, would have been able to defend themselves mightily against aggressors."

This is when the book goes horribly wrong. Canter could have chosen a bizarre ending, an apocalyptic one, a happy or a sad one. Instead he goes for the

Sandman: The Kindly Ones

by Neil Gaiman Published by Titan Hardback graphic novel £24.99 Out now

DC COMICS VERTIGO
The Sandman
The Kindly Ones
Neil Gaiman
Marc Hempel
Richard Case
D'Israeli
Teddy Kristiansen
Glyn Dillon
Charles Vess
Dean Ormston
Kevin Nowlan

Of all the experiments undertaken in recent years in the world of comics, Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* series must rank among the best. Its pseudo-mythological story lines which are resolved by clever storytelling rather than violent confrontation have established comic books with a new sense of credibility and worth.

The Kindly Ones is chock-full of the usual quirky Gaiman wizardry. Satan, voluntarily deposed from leading Hell, is playing piano in a sophisticated bar, the lands of faerie and dream intermingle seamlessly with the ordinary waking world and the Lord of Dreams is his usual enigmatic self. The story is a typically dark one, concentrating on revenge, lost love and the feeble yearnings of the godly for a share of humanity's joys and follies.

"Once again, I perceive the void beneath the surface of all things."

This is still one of the greatest tales ever told in a graphic novel and is essential reading for anyone who wants to try and tell believable and yet fantastical episodic stories. Gaiman is a master of his craft.

Steve Faragher

Score 9/10

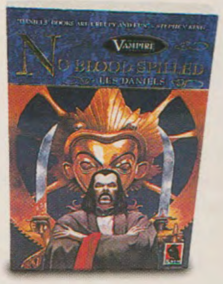
Crap Ending option and you come away feeling cheated and used. Shame, really. I was willing to forgive the various failures in plot and style because I was quite getting into the Neanderthals.

Richard Jones **Score 5/10**

* * *

No Blood Spilled

by Les Daniels **Published by Raven** **Paperback £4.99** **Out now**



In the second part of the adventures of vampire Sebastian Newcastle, he is pursued from England to colonial India by his bitter enemy Reginald Callender, who will not rest until the vampire is destroyed… It's old hat, of course, but Callender is one of the pluses. Dishevelled and obsessive, his world is upturned by powers beyond him.

Helped along by the hot and oppressive atmosphere of India, and reminders of how unkind the British were, the story at least has the sense to keep moving fast enough to avoid making itself too easy a target. It's mercifully short, too.

The major problem though, is the vampire: Newcastle is not nearly mad, nasty, or inscrutable enough; and he never really scares or convinces. He does have his fill of blood, it's true, but then he also takes a little orphan boy under his wing, who he apparently quite likes. His bark, it seems, is worse than his bite.

"Will we fly again soon?"

"Daniel's books are creepy and fun," declares Stephen King's cover blurb. Enjoyable this may be, but it certainly isn't very creepy, and if Daniels intended it to be light-hearted it doesn't make up for the rather cheesy ending. It spirals into a Holmes-versus-Moriarty affair that makes occassionally pleasant, but on the whole, unremarkable entertainment.

Gideon Kibblewhite **Score 4/10**

* * *

Projekt UFO

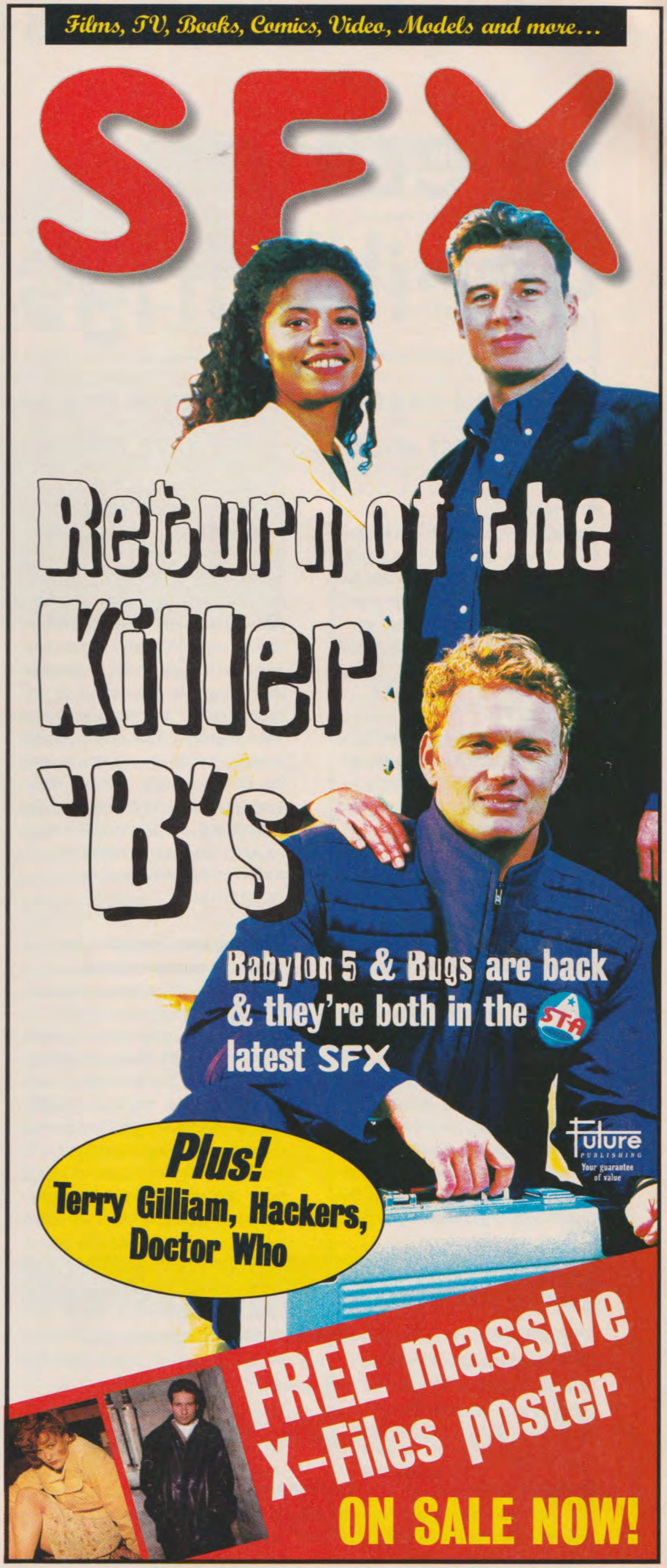
by WA Harbinson **Published by Boxtree** **Paperback £6.99** **Out now**

Flying saucers exist. But they don't come from Outer Space: they are made in Antarctica using Nazi technology and a slave colony of ex-concentration camp inmates. *Projekt UFO* claims to provide conclusive proof that this is true. So does it? Well, no – it's all speculation, persuasion and hearsay – but don't let that detract from your reading pleasure, this is good stuff.

There's a lot of logical leapfrogging, but this is a meticulously researched overview of the UFO phenomenon in the 20th century and the international conspiracy of deceit surrounding it. However, *Projekt UFO* contains nothing that will convince the sceptic. For, while working in accordance with Ockham's razor, the author fails to produce any incontrovertible evidence that flying saucers *do* exist, let alone that they are man-made. That, admittedly, would be a tall order, but the blurb on the cover specifically makes this claim, so the book's a disappointment for that. Cracking read, though.

"They have been seen hanging in the air over German territory, sometimes singly, sometimes in clusters."
***South Wales Argus* 13th December 1944**

Jonathan Palmer Score **8/10**


Films, TV, Books, Comics, Video, Models and more…
SFX
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Babylon 5 & Bugs are back & they're both in the latest SFX
Future Publishing
Your guarantee of value
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FREE massive X-Files poster
ON SALE NOW!

arcane scribblings

Bags and bags of letters again this month, and the most fervently debated topic? Last month's brief but telling intrusion from The Real World...

Dear arcane,

The **arcane** feature I've found most interesting is issue 3's 'Strangeness and Charm'. It was spot on. After five years of roleplaying, the Reverend Dowling has developed in a way I would never have predicted: at first he was an idealistic acolyte willing to set the world to rights and vanquish evil; five years on he's became a fat, occasionally jolly inkeeper who spends all his money on drink.

"spends all his money on drink"

James Foxall

Dear arcane,

There is only one thing worse than an unpainted figure in a figure review and that is a badly painted figure. It is the only thing to be said in favour of *White Dwarf* if you don't play Games Workshop games – their painted miniatures look very good in print. If the painting would detract from the figure, just undercoat it and black-wash it; otherwise, paint them fully.

Finally, please *please* keep your scenarios (and the splendid centre-section settings) systemless. The moment you start publishing system-specific scenarios you will have readers that don't know the system. Even with *AD&D*. Any half-bright referee can convert a generic description to the system of their choice, but it is virtually impossible to convert scenarios from a system you have no knowledge of, especially when magic is concerned. By all means include side-bar conversion notes, especially if the setting for the scenario has its own game system (for example, listing possible magic items/spells for an NPC) to keep the pick-up-and-run advocates happy, but keep the main scenario clear of numbers (attributes, levels etc).

Kirstin Darke

We try to please. Notice that our figures are no longer painted.

Dear Steve,

I decided to take out a year's subscription with Future Publishing. Having missed the first issue, I sent an extra £3 and requested a back copy (an advert on page 14 of issue 3 stated its availability). About a month later I received a refund and an 'out of stock' note. If you have a spare copy of **arcane** 1 lying about in the office somewhere, could you feel it in your heart to send it to me?

Rob Gurney

If only we could Rob. **arcane** *1 is very sold out – we can't get hold of copies here in the office and are reduced to stealing each other's during moments of distraction. Sorry.*

communication

If you'd like to get in touch with **arcane** *there are several ways. The most traditional is to send us a letter clearly marked* **'arcane scribblings'** *and addressed to* **arcane**, 30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW. *The slightly more technically advanced can send us a* fax on (01225) 465982, *while all you fully fledged InfoCyberOtakuNauts out there can e-mail us at:*

`arcane@futurenet.co.uk` ***or visit our web site on:***

`http://www.futurenet.co.uk/entertainment/arcane.html.`

We look forward to hearing from you.

Hellooo roleplay mag people,

I'm not someone who would run any of your generic scenarios, but I've blatantly stolen and changed them, which shows they must be good.

The 'Heart of the Matter' article brought up some valid points that showed that *all* involved in roleplaying must consider their motives. A referee who revels in his NPCs always saving the day or players whose entire characters exist as real people who need to defecate and spend hours courting young maidens can be tedious and ultimately destructive. But if the group can cope with these idiosyncrasies and still enjoy themselves then so be it – who am I to criticise? – but I won't be accepting any invitations to join in, or extending them either.

I would hate to see '**arcane** scribblings' degenerate into a forum on how to roleplay properly or other pointless issues that *Dragon* happily publishes. Criticism has its place, but only if it's constructive – childish bickering would insult **arcane**'s mature, whimsical style. It confuses me why someone would waste the time and effort to write such complete trousers like Mr 'The Real World' other than to cause trouble. I don't see why it was printed other than to show how pointless it was.

Anyhow, please paint your models completely, advertise till you explode so as to make the magazine bigger and better, finish your 'World Builder' with advice on how to market our worlds, and, whatever you do, never compromise the integrity of your ship's hull cos it leads to fatal implosions with deadly consequences to the field lattices of Princess Breasts' under-arm and over-shoulder boulder holder.

"never compromise the integrity of your ship's hull"

Steve Hunter

Well only a fool would, Steve.

Dear arcane,

Using generic articles for games is brilliant: there is nothing more annoying than finding a magazine filled with specific scenarios for games that you don't play.

The 'Golden Dragon Inn' article was excellent. Most of my *WFRP* players thought it was a nice and safe bar, until the troll slayer tried it on with Tess the landlady and lost an arm. The feature was in-depth, easy to use and best of all it cut out a lot of time and effort. Are you going to keep producing these pullout supplements? And if not, why not?

Edward Thurlow

Yes, we are, and we're glad that so many of you have taken the time to write in and tell us you like 'em. Makes us feel all tingly.

Dear arcane,

'Cjmorr@essex.ac.uk' wrote that the red squirrel has been driven out by the grey – this is not so. Red squirrels could not adapt to living alongside humans and so most of them died

I could barely restrain myself

Letter Of The MONTH

Dear arcane,

I could barely restrain myself from reading **arcane** 4 on the way home from the shop because the CCG of my favourite book (*The Lord of the Rings*) was reviewed in my favourite RPG magazine. I was not disappointed with the competent review and reasonable scoring. I've been persuaded to buy the game.

But in '**arcane** Scribblings' I read a letter by a man so scared of retribution because of his misguided views that he failed to put his second name. (Or do you run some sort of protection programme for these sort of people?) Harry specifically asks for supplement space for certain RPGs and then a few lines later accuses *White Dwarf* – incidentally not related to the RPG world, so if you don't like it you have no need to buy it – and Citadel Miniatures of 'narrow-minded bias'! I am not restarting the *White Dwarf*/Game Workshop argument; I am just trying to put the misguided few back on the track to RPG Heaven. Wargames, CCGs, LARP and any other form of RPG that may arise in the near future are all the same, so let the past be the past and let's live in harmony. Or I'll send round the trolls!

James Parkin

We agree entirely James. The past is the past. The future is the future. Let us all work together and bring peace and harmony to a world that's already suffering too much. And have a T-shirt on us. We love you.

out, whereas the greys adapted, since by nature they are not overly shy creatures. In some areas both live side by side. Also, due to the red squirrels' demise the greys had a ready-made habitat to move in to.

As for card games overtaking roleplaying, I disagree. Roughly ten years ago the *Fighting Fantasy* books came out and everyone was saying they'd take over RPGs. At the time they did, but eventually everybody went back to RPGs. I personally like the *Star Trek* CCG but I much prefer playing a good RPG. I truly think the majority of people think the same. Card games are quick and easy to play but you can't beat an RPG for sheer playability. I think in a few years time they will probably die down. At the moment it's something new, and when anything new arrives it always takes the public eye.

Peter Lang

And that's enough debate about squirrels. The topic ends here.

Dear arcane,

I was glad to see a new independent roleplaying mag. It's good to see smaller roleplaying systems gain coverage in the light of the glut of CCGs. While CCGs are the latest thing in fantasy-related gaming, most don't have the appeal to keep casual players interested for too long. I remember at school crazes for various collectable stickers/cards petering out after a year or two. The major setback of CCGs is that while they introduce new players to fantasy gaming, they seem to be killing off some of the more interesting and lesser-known/backed games.

Does anyone know if TSR plan to release any more rules for *Battlesystem*? With all the *AD&D* material, and a few rules changes, it could be one of the best miniature rules system around.

Have TSR released a price for their *AD&D* core rules on CD-ROM? Will **arcane** review it?

ST Mather

TSR say that they have no plans to release any new material for Battlesystem *this year. Sorry about that. As for the* AD&D *rules – see Despatches for the latest on that.*

Dear folks @arcane,

I was joyous when, being a poor student, I managed to scrape together the cash for a year's subscription and the first delicious issue (number 4) came sliding through my letterbox. Imagine my subsequent horror when I saw a postcard in my mag that said if I had waited one more issue before subscribing I would have received a free **arcane** T-shirt of the black kind I had drooled over and for which I'd prayed for the three previous issues. In it I would have made a fashion statement to outdo the very Toreador. Your cruelness doth match the very Drow. And so I wish to cancel my subscription now, and then re-subscribe before the next issue so I can receive one of the aforementioned garments and be the toast of my roleplaying society. Unless of course you send me one for my letter…

Tamsyn Hutchinson

> "came sliding through my letterbox"

Aah. Sorry – the offers change every so often and if we sent you a T-shirt everyone would want one and, and, oh... all right. But you'll have to write in and tell us what size and colour you want.

Dear arcane,

The views of other gamers are always interesting, but I noticed a letter in '**arcane** Scribblings' from a god-like intellect signing himself as 'The Real World.' On reading the first sentence I began to wonder. By the end I was so annoyed I felt compelled to action.

Why do you print rubbish like this? Anyone who has been a gamer for any length of time has noticed that there are some extremely small-minded people out there – thanks, but we had noticed.

What this worldly intelligence failed to notice is that a few of his arguments are flawed. He says people get involved in RPGs because their real lives are dull and boring; following this line of logic people reading novels, watching TV or ➔

arcane shorts

Bits that didn't make it into the main letters section.

I have grown up with RPGs and it seems obvious that the foolish Mr Real World is the one living in the dreamworld, dreaming he has friends. Employers lap up players because of their team skills and lateral thinking. Letters like this should no longer be printed. Keep **arcane** for those who enjoy it.

Mark Baillie

In reply to the The real World: I have a degree; my friends that I roleplay with include a consultant anthologist, a cartographer and a journalist – none of use suffer from no-friends syndrome.

You featured the Papa Cuthulu stuffed toy in **arcane** 4 but the address was American – anywhere that I can get this in the UK?

David

That's enough about The Real World. And sorry, no, the Papa Cthulhu toy is only available from the States.

Will you be printing any game scenarios in future issues, and will you be accepting them from independent sources? It seems a sad fact today that so many other RPG magazines use the same writers on a week-in-week-out basis.

Louis Turfrey

Why did you have *Runequest* Ducks as among the lamest races in RPGs? In our campaign they were a serious race with their own cultural traditions and motivations, not Howard-the-Duck types. They made the campaign richer – more so than Hobbits would have. Shudder.

Gisby

letters

← films, or playing computer games have dull and boring lives. He claims gamers have 'little intelligence' – hold on: isn't it the people with little intelligence who go around condemning groups of people just because of who they *think* they are? If people are so small-minded they can't get their minds around the fact that we are all different and like different things, and that we should tolerate each other, then I feel very very sorry for them. They are the *truly* sad ones, going through life considering that anyone who doesn't fit their image of the perfect person is the enemy, to be attacked and condemned. Finally, who appointed this prat judge, jury and executioner of humanity?

Martin Brain

Dear sirs,

Thank you indeed to Ms Drop for taking the time to reply to my humble comments in the last issue of **arcane**. While I would correct her on one point – Dan is short for Danton, not Daniel and, yes, I am considering suing my parents – she made several good, valid points.

So good and valid, in fact, that I wonder if she would consider meeting me to discuss them over an intimate dinner *à deux*?

Just us, our opinions, good food, good music and the flickering light of a slowly burning pile of rare *Magic* cards. No? Ah, well, one has to try, you know.

Dan Pergon

Dear arcane

I'm addicted to many things – chocolate, *M:TG*, magical boots and **arcane**. Unfortunately, I can only subscribe to **arcane**, so I started to fill in the form and discovered a fact that tickled my armour-plated ribs… I pay exactly £6142 less than the rest of the world for my 12 magazines. Check it out for yourselves if you don't believe me!

Catherine 'Randy Xethilian' Hope

We've checked and we did find one example where the subscription rate for the rest of the world did seem to be missing a decimal point. At least, we think that's what Catherine's going on about…

Dear arcane,

In his column in **arcane** 4, Andrew Rilstone talks about possible futuristic intelligent computers, and doubts that such things would be put to work refereeing roleplaying games. He's probably right, but I remember seeing a TV interview with a veteran computer scientist who said that he and his pals used to sit around in the evening, talking about what would happen to the world when everyone could have a computer in their own home. They imagined all sorts of uses for such machines, but they never guessed the biggest and most widespread use – playing games.

"doubts that such things would be put to work"

Phil Masters

Quite right, Phil.

Dear arcane,

In response to Tim Norton's letter about Grenadier figures: the old *CoC* range is still in production (with additions) as the *Horror* range. Try Grenadier, PO Box 305, Springfield, PA, USA 19064 (tel 001 610 623-5780). RAFM mail order takes months in Canada, but the figures are worth it.

Tim Peterson Winnipeg, Canada

Thank you very much, Tim. That's very public-spirited of you.

Dear all,

Let me compliment you on the fine article by Paul Mason on the Japanese role-playing scene. Does *GURPS Ring*Dream* have an ISBN? Or is it possible to establish contact with a shipper? Even the address of a stockist in Japan would probably be enough. It'd certainly be something different to play at FurryCon this year.

Andy Anderson

If there is an ISBN it's in Japanese and we can't find it. Your only hope is that Paul Mason reads this and gets in touch. Paul? Hello?

Dear arcane,

Regarding system vs non-system orientated material in **arcane**: you could hit a compromise by producing scenarios for particular types of roleplaying. For example, one month run a scenario in a space environment (for *Traveller, Star Wars*, etc). Have a number of settings and change them each month. Also, a section to convert stats between particular games would help the newer referees to use scenarios for a system of their choice.

Karl Wasley

Er, as regards your first point, that's what we do, isn't it? All right, there hasn't been much sci-fi stuff – but there will be. And if we have a section to convert stats which systems would we use? And we'd have less space for our Encounter. What does everyone else think?

Dear arcane,

I would like to get into one of White Wolf's *Storyteller* games, but apart from the review of *Mage 2nd Edition* in issue 5 I really don't know that much about them.

Wouldn't it be great if **arcane** devoted a couple of pages a month to reviewing existing RPGs? People like me would be able to find out about existing games without waiting for new editions to come out and without having to fork out 17 quid a time for the rulebooks.

"people like me would be able"

David Lees

That's a very good idea, and one we'll be considering. Thanks, David.

Hello,

I especially liked issue 5's 'Roru Prayingu' feature but – shock horror – there was no mention of *Record of Lodoss War*! This is a series of fantasy novels written by Ryo Mizuno and based on games using a RPG system he and his mates had cobbled together from a few imported *D&D* books. They were such a success that a *Record of Lodoss War* RPG was released. This was what started the interest in roleplaying in Japan! It was made into a 13-part animé with Chara designs by Nobetoru Yuuki. A sequel was planned but an accident involving the head of the publisher's animé department, some money, the police and a large quantity of drugs got in the way.

Neil Hughes

PS Is it true that the *Don't Look Back* RPG is in fact the official *Oasis* RPG involving such skills as Eyebrows and Lennon imitation?

It did mention Lodoss War*. It did. Although not in the detail you do.*

Dear arcane,

I think systemless content is great – I don't see the point of scenarios in magazines at all, really, but that is a personal thing. I like your generic features – they are good and well-written – but sometimes I get the impression they are not telling people anything they did not already know. What I suggest is a compromise: make some more genre-specific rather than system-specific. Features for specific systems are a non-starter, but surely no one can argue with genre-specific pieces?

I've had a problem with pointy-eared Dan Joyce's series from the start. How can you listen to someone who can't rationalise *Star Trek* transporters? "Why don't they have bigger and better ones on Earth and forget the Enterprise altogether?" Well, transporters have limited range [*involved justifications for the existence of spaceships follow. They have been removed to protect the innocent – Ed]…*

You could ask: why do people use so much paper and destroy so many trees when computers communicating with each other are so common? Why have logic when you can have fun? I don't dislike the series, I just don't like being taught from 'bad' examples, especially when I don't think they're bad.

Eyal Teler

arcane On-Line

arcane has a new team member, but you won't find her lurking within these pages. Karen Levell's our On-line editor, beavering away on our World Wide Web site, and she'd like a word with you...

Hello and welcome!

Uh-oh, the end of the mag is nigh. There's no use denying it – there are only a few more tantalising pages to go before you reach the end of this issue, and already you're wishing for more – more advice, more news, more reviews, and more endless debate about the reputed evil of collectable card games. In short, more **arcane**.

Well, call it luck, good fortune or a ruthless attempt to dominate your every waking hour, but you can now get all the roleplaying information you need, whenever you need it. As part of the Futurenet Internet site, the **arcane** Web pages offer all the advice and news you've come to expect from the paper-based magazine, and a Hell of a lot more besides.

You can e-mail the team, check out previous issues, browse through our list of top roleplaying sites and even chat to other like-minded dice-slingers. The best is yet to come, though. Plans are already in place to expand the **arcane** forum and, with a newsgroup interface, it'll be even easier to use. We'll also be creating an up-to-the minute roleplaying news service, so you can read the stories as they break. And there's even talk about live question and answer sessions with various roleplaying game creators.

Yes, **arcane** On-line is big, and it's getting bigger. So, what are you waiting for? Boot up your computer, log onto the Net, and point your Web browser at `http://www.futurenet.co.uk/entertainment/arcane.htma` to join in the fun. There are dozens of people logging on every day, people with the same interests as you, and this is your chance to get to know them.

Karen Levell, On-line editor
`klevell@futurenet.co.uk`

The debate rages on about all manner of RPG related issues on the **arcane** forum. Here's a taster of what's going on there...

On the topic of horror in roleplaying games...

Question: Is genuine degeneracy appropriate for a game (I'm thinking of *Underworld Enemies*, *Destiny's Price*, and so on)?
paskins@kcl.ac.uk

Basically, I think you have to judge whether or not its a good thing by your own group's attitudes. Everyone has their own idea of just what is degenerate. Shocking the players and not just their characters can have a good effect on game play, provided you don't truly gross someone out.
l.a.wilson@ncl.ac.uk

I have yet to see an RPG that allows you to portray a degenerate condition or situation accurately, and I doubt I ever will. Why? Because such situations and conditions are almost by definition NOT FUN. It's OK being evil provided you've got a nice leather jacket and a Harley and an evil grin, but how many role players are willing to confront a situation where the victim is someone who is really dear to them?
JW4@bolton.ac.uk

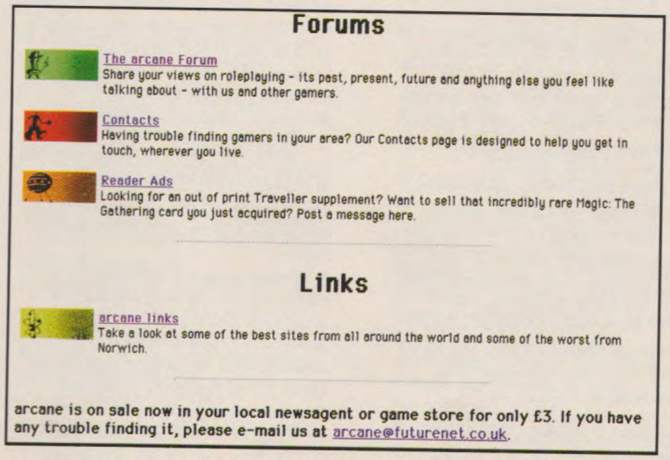
If you can introduce REAL HORROR into your game then all well and good but I doubt it... You can't really inspire terror unless you actually murder your players (not their characters). As no-one does this then we'll never know. And you can't inspire horror without leaving the remains of the guy you axed lying on the gaming table for the rest of the guys when they come back from fetching the pizza and the beer.
johnston-mil@ulst.ac.uk

One member of our group used to run *Spacemaster* and he used to have nightmares about all those tables. Okay, maybe its not *true* horror, but I think it counts as messing with your mind!
l.a.wilson@ncl.ac.uk

And more on character death (see the feature on page 28)...

I'd like to start by saying I like a high PC turn-over rate, for myself as player. In this I think I'm quite unusual. I like my games/characters to have a beginning, middle and end. I hate it when games finish in the middle of things. When I run games I understand most players don't want to see their PC killed off. Yet when I play them I like to see my PC die heroically, or otherwise. Like all/most players, I hate pointless character deaths, but I don't mind a good death for my PC. Personally I find having a character die adds something to my memory of that character.
dave.maple@wmc.ac.uk

How do you feel when one of your characters dies? Either contribute to the forum, or drop us a line to **arcane** scribblings at the usual address.



Forums

The arcane Forum
Share your views on roleplaying - its past, present, future and anything else you feel like talking about - with us and other gamers.

Contacts
Having trouble finding gamers in your area? Our Contacts page is designed to help you get in touch, wherever you live.

Reader Ads
Looking for an out of print Traveller supplement? Want to sell that incredibly rare Magic: The Gathering card you just acquired? Post a message here.

Links

arcane links
Take a look at some of the best sites from all around the world and some of the worst from Norwich.

arcane is on sale now in your local newsagent or game store for only £3. If you have any trouble finding it, please e-mail us at arcane@futurenet.co.uk.

Check out the **arcane** forums for more debate, reader contacts and ads.

What you need to get on-line

*To access **arcane** On-line on Futurenet – and the whole Internet, for that matter – you need the following bits and pieces...*

A computer (PC, Mac, Amiga, etc), a telephone line (your household line is fine), a modem (14,400 baud or 28,800 baud is best), and an Internet account (try Demon on 0181 371 1000 - they provide a good, cheap service).

free reader ads

Buying or selling a game? Advertising or looking for a club or other roleplayers? Conventions? Fanzines? Strange messages to your friends? It's all here in the reader ads...

games for sale

- *Bloodbowl* boxed set and *Deathzone* all for £35. Gareth Williams, Pencern Bach, Rhydyllafdy Pwllheli, Gwynedd LL53 7YP
- *Council of Wyrms, Dark Sun, Star Wars 2nd Ed, Advanced Heroquest* – £10 each. *Epic, Dragon Masters, Cardmasters* – £5 each. Simon 01905 840532
- *Epic Space Marine*, excellent condition with substantial ork and eldar marine forces (will not split). Tel: 01977 615271
- *Fiend Folio* (good cond) £25. *WFB* armies (painted). Over 100 figures, three armies. Ian Pillott, 7a Gree Parade, Whitton Rd, Whitton, Middx TP3 2EN
- *Greyhawk* classics for sale. SAE for list. Jeremy Winstanley, 6 Dunoon Close, Calcot, Reading, Berks RG31 7YJ
- GW gamebooks, boardgames and novels. For list send SAE to Alex Gardener, 4 Thorne Avenue, Flixton, Manchester M41 5PY
- *Judge Dredd* RPG (boxed), *Judge Dredd Companion, Judgement Day, Slaughter Margin, Citi-block Floorplans.* Offers. Dan 0181 6429626
- Loads of *Cthulhu* books and figures. Will sell or swap for *MERP* sourcebooks or rulebooks. Call Chris 01253 25080
- *Ravenloft Starter, Forbidden Lore, Monst. Comp., Van Richten's Guide*, two expansions + one adventure. Worth £60. Offers? 01278 458094
- *Runequest, Advanced Runequest, Monsters, Land of Ninja, Gods of Glorantha, Griffin Island, Monster Coliseum, Cities.* Dan 0181 6429626
- *Silver Bayonet* as new, unused. £10. Call 01978 710483
- *Warhammer* dwarf, orc, skaven armies. Offers, tel: 01276 858291

cards for sale

- For sale: *M:TG* card collection including full 4th Ed and *Homelands* sets. Best offer accepted. Phone Willie, Dumfries on 01387 268626
- *Magic, ST:TNG, Doomtrooper, Star Wars, Spellfire, Wyvern* + others. Send SAE stating interests. Jon Simcoe, 34 Charles St., Kettering, Northants, NN16 9RN
- *Star Wars* CCG. Full set £275. *ST Alternative Universe* set (121 cards) £45. Neil 01327 262765 weekends

wanted

- Copy of *Forgotten Realms* scenario called *Nightwatch in the Living City* – needed to borrow/buy. Alex Taggart 0151 3439363
- *Dungeons & Dragons* adventure modules *B3* and *B4*. Contact Ray, evenings only 01394 670423
- Issue 1 of **arcane** and issues 1 and 2 of *SFX*. Will pay reasonable price if in good condition. Phone 01278 450681 after 6pm
- *MERP* modules and campaign packs in good condition. Also *Hawkmoon* RPG. Cash paid. Ian Corrie, 17 Greenhill, Brampton, Cumbria CA8 1SU
- *Strahd's Possession* CD-ROM version clue book. Please help. Gary Mouwfield, 8 Soughtgate, Flixton, Manchester M41 9FS
- Wanted: any HP Lovecraft literature, *CoC* material and players for serious *CoC* campaigns. Call Steve 01934 620849 9pm+
- Wanted: groups to help organise a charity sci-fi/roleplaying event in the South East. Phone Paul 01273 886805
- Wanted: *Ringworld* (Chaosium), *Dr Who* scenarios and supplements (FASA). Contact: Paul Baldowski, 93 Newark Drive, Corby, Northants NN18 0HA
- *White Dwarf* magazine from issues 84 to 151. Peter Gurnett, 48 Denny Ave, Waltham Abbey, Essex EN9 1NT

clubs

- Albion Guard Games Club. Mon/Tues evenings. The Plough, Cattlemarket, Ipswich. RPGs, CCGs, wargames, boardgames. Bob 01449 770959
- Alternative Realities, Eastbourne's premier games club. Monday nights 7–10pm. Contact Jarec 01323 500624 email jarec@cix.compulink.co.uk
- BADW meet Wednesday evenings at Bragbury End, Stevenage for roleplaying, wargaming etc. Contact Jane Williams 01438 367799
- Birmingham Central Roleplayers. Thursdays 7.30. Ladywood Community Centre. Bar. Over 16s. About £1 a night. Steve Jones 0121 5857263
- Black Country RPS. Thu 7.30. Albright & Wilson Rec, Station Rd, Oldbury, W Mids. All ages and games. 70p a night. Steve Turner 01384 235244
- Brentwood Roleplay Club. Thurs 7–10pm, Sherwood House in Highwood Hospital Grounds. £1 a night. All ages. Turn up!
- Central London Branch of The Guild of Melee and Magic meets every Monday and Tuesday. Jason on 0181 7158675
- Doncaster Roleplaying Guild meets Sundays, 7pm, at British Sub-aqua Club, Greyfriars Rd, behind St George's Church
- Dragons on the Hill. Now residing at the Castle, Furnival St, London EC4. Age 18+, Wednesdays, 7pm+, upper room
- East London Branch of The Guild of Melee and Magic meets every Thursday. Phone Douglas on 0181 5535332
- Elemental Lords LRP based in Worcester: a fantasy game of magic, mayhem and monsters. Contact Paul 01905 425672
- Established veteran RPG group seeks fresh input. Glasgow area. Own transport useful, not essential. Contact David 0141 6384170
- Exeter University Games Society meets Sundays from 2pm in the Cornwall House Refectory, Exeter University Campus
- Fantasy/*Vampire* LRP, Derby/Nottingham. Contact Martin Lee 08501 89892
- Fomoria LRP club. Forest adventures in darkest Dorset. Latex weapons, experienced monsters. Beginners welcome. Contact Darren 01725 517322
- Glasgow University Gaming Society meets Thurs 5pm, Queen Margaret Union, University Gardens. Term time only. Non-students welcome
- Help! We are trapped inside the amazing *Spider-Man*! Haverhill Games Club. Will play anything. Phone Bob 01440 712910
- Inverness roleplaying and wargaming association meets Railway Club (upstairs) Mondays, 6–10pm. Fee: £1.20. First night free
- *IOW, Masquerade, Vampire*, LRP meetings every other Sunday, Newport Youth Centre, 7.15pm. Details 01983 528758 Nigel. New members wanted
- Leatherhead Games Club. Small group meet Mondays in Leatherhead. Currently running *Earthdawn* campaign. Interested? Jef on 01372 375202
- *Magic: The Gathering, Star Wars & Star Trek.* Join our playing group in Bristol. Call 0117 9721701
- *M:TG* Brentwood Informals meet in the Essex Arms, Brentwood, Sunday nights. Phone PJ for details on 01277 224834
- Portsmouth, Tuesdays, *Ars Magica* campaign and other RPGs alternate weeks, 20s–40s. SOH. Referees welcome. Ring Ian 01705 240101
- Renegade roleplaying club starting again soon in Ilford, Essex area. Over 16s. If interested contact Mark on 0181 4915382
- Roleplayers of Chester. Weds, 7.30–late. Chester Rail Club, Lightfoot St, Chester. Contact Ged 01244 314435 or Greg 01606 883698
- Roleplayers wanted. No trained killers. Meet in Irvine, Ayrshire. Play most RPGs, *Vampire* etc. Phone David on 01294 275267
- Roleplaying & games club, Thursdays 6.30pm–10.00pm. The Parkhouse Centre, Bude, Cornwall. For more details ring 01288 355612
- RPGA Network Roleplaying Club. New members welcome. Sunday afternoons 1.45pm, 2nd Arnold Scout HQ, Calverton Rd, Arnold, Nottingham
- Shadow Warriors West London Branch of The Guild of Melee and Magic meets every Saturday. Phone Gerald on 0181 7239008
- Small roleplaying group seeks new players in Felixstowe area. 16+. Wide variety of games played. Call Paul 01394 276975
- South London Branch of the Guild of Melee and Magic meets every Sunday. Phone Jon on 0181 6999654
- Sword & Sorcery LRP, Manchester. Contact 'Nemesis' 0161 7476905 or write 2 Whitegates Rd, Cheadle SK8 1EA
- The Dark Door Club runs *Cthulhu*-esque LRP adventures. For information contact P Hardy, 32 Park Hall Road, London SE21 8DW
- Wyldlands LRP. Celtic and Dark Age adventures in a land of ancient magic. Andy, 63 Westbury Drive, Macclesfield, Cheshire

contacts

- 15-year old *AD&D* player seeks fellow gamers in the Portsmouth area. Please, please contact me soon. Stuart 01705 610901
- 18-year old seeks others to game with (GM or player) in Oxford area. Call Liam 01608 810827
- 30-year old seeks group/individuals; Matlock/Cromford area. Can ref at a push. Phone Gary 01629 826112
- *40k* and *Warhammer* players wanted. Tunbridge Wells area. Please contact Anthony Burgess, 33 Leeves Close, Heathfield TN21 0AW
- *AD&D* player looking to join (or start) club in Worcester Park, Stoneleigh area. Ring Jeffrey on 0181 3373138
- *AD&D, GURPS, WFRP, Runequest* and *Judge Dredd* player seeks club in Pitlochry area. Also played *Traveller*. David 01796 472211
- Appreciators of all things imaginary contact 'The Dead Duet' to form group into fantasy/sci-fi. 22 Tormead, Hythe, Southampton 01703 849842
- Beginner, 26, seeks maturer group for adventure. Play anything. Herts/N London area. Julian 01727 838975
- Complete novice (early 20s) seeks local RPG group. Taunton area. Will travel. Neil 01823 353681
- Contacts to form shared interest group. Into sci-fi, horror, gaming. London area. Call Nick on 0181 677 2293
- Contacts wanted in NE London area. RPGs or wargames. Steve 0181 5212064
- Crowthorne novice seeks gamers. Any level. View to forming club. Write: Myf, Cypress House, Pinewood Ave. Crowthorne, Berks. RG45 6RS
- Cumbria. Male (31) seeks group in Keswick/Penrith/Workington area. Open

reader ads

to all [redacted] to try some new ones. [redacted] 75184

● [redacted] and GM wanted, aged [redacted] Kilbride area. Contact [redacted] 245120

● [redacted] fresh talent with open [redacted] RPGs and LARPs. Contact [redacted] 2801097

● [redacted] player seeks players in [redacted] 6145705 Ken

● [redacted] player seeks other [redacted] Chippenham area. Please [redacted] 462073

● [redacted] RPG group seeks fresh [redacted] Transport useful, not essential. [redacted] 6384170

● [redacted] GM seeks three or four players [redacted] campaign. North London. [redacted] Simon on 0181 3723449

● [redacted] Doncaster area) wants to roleplay [redacted] help? Contact Jane. [redacted] 881346

● [redacted] novice *AD&D* player and [redacted] seeks others of similar age/[redacted] Dumfries area. Laura [redacted]

● GM, [redacted] sensible RPG groups in [redacted] hack 'n' slash. Call James [redacted]

● [redacted] in Taunton/Burnham on Sea [redacted] *AD&D* to eager beginner. [redacted] 684245 for details

● [redacted] seeks fellow gamers in Craven, [redacted] soon. Ages 12–16. Contact [redacted] 633472

● [redacted] players in London please contact [redacted] 0171 3597318 (evenings). [redacted] campaign will travel

● Help! [redacted] (25) seeks group, Manchester [redacted] GM for or play with. Phone [redacted] 2998

● Help! GM [redacted] inspiration for *Rifts, Cyberpunk,* [redacted] *WFRP.* Contact [redacted] 4581388 or BE1MAM[redacted]

● Novice [redacted] looking for a club in the [redacted] Birmingham area of Midlands. [redacted] 01384 836343

● In [redacted] veteran (player/DM) keen to [redacted] Try anything! Bristol [redacted] on 01275 830080

● [redacted] player seeks gaming group [redacted] Any fantasy, horror, science [redacted] cyberpunk. Contact Andy [redacted]

● Leicester [redacted] players for regular games/[redacted] travel locally. Contact Dave, [redacted] Road, Groby, Leics

● Looking [redacted] players in Carlisle area. [redacted] 2 Parham Grove, Belle Vue, [redacted] CA2 7RW. Aged 17+

● *M:TG* [redacted] players wanted in Horsham, [redacted] area. Contact Paul, (aged 15) [redacted] 733433

● *M:TG,* [redacted] *WFRP* players [redacted] Sutton, Surrey area. Must have sense [redacted] humour and like beer. 18+ only. [redacted]

● *Magic:* [redacted] players and card swaps, [redacted] Islingtons, London area. S Hong [redacted] All welcome

● [redacted] seeks players (French scenarios [redacted] Only over 17s. Central [redacted] Jonathan 0171 3510470

● Newcastle/[redacted] area. V experienced GM/player seeks group. Owns *AD&D, Storyteller, Cthulhu, BattleTech* plus. Alan 0191 3887122

● Newcomer seeks letters from anyone into roleplaying. Gael Bladen–Hovell, 13 Hillside Ave, Silverstone, Towcester Northants NN12 8LR 01327 857488

● Noble and Elf Ranger seek other *Warhammer Quest* roleplayers in the Huddersfield area. 13+. Contact Sir Albert Uttergeit 01484 511170

● Novice gamer seeks sci-fi or fantasy gamers in Greater London/Richmond, Surrey area. I am 12. Contact 0181 2411357

● Novice roleplayers aged about 13 in Edinburgh/Midlothian area write to David Storey, 14 Inkerman Court, Peniculk, Scotland EH26 0LS

● Novice RPG player needs group of adults to game with. Any system. Chester-le-Street, County Durham 0191 3885691 Alan

● Novice seeks RPG group aged 17–20. Mix of genres and systems preferred. Chesterfield area. Contact Richard 01246 233435

● Opponents needed for any game systems, especially tabletop wargames. Years of experience with GW games. Contact Chris 0181 3109360

● Players wanted for fantasy and sci-fi postal RPGs. Please contact Paul Baldowski, 93 Newark Drive, Corby, Northants NN18 0HA

● Players wanted for fantasy and sci-fi postal RPGs. Write Stewart Leary, 9 Oundle Rd, Alwalton, Peterborough PE7 3UP

● Players/GMs of any RPGs contact David Storey, 14 Inkerman Court, Penicuik EH26 0LS. Age: 13-15, area: Midlothian/Edinburgh

● Players/storytellers wanted for *Werewolf: the Apocalypse.* Also maybe other RPGs. Medway area. Contact Neal 01634 719194

● Playtesters required for new LRP game called *Conflict!* It's fantasy based. Interested? Call Mark on 0181 4915382

● *Rage, Magic, Blood Bowl*! 13-year old player needs somebody to play with. Nicholas Gunn, Laverstock, Salisbury 01722 337382

● Roleplayers wanted. Doncaster area. Age 17+. *Vampires, Stormbringer, Darkside.* Jo Smith, 89 Hexthorpe, Doncaster, S Yorkshire DN4 0BE

● Small roleplaying group seeks new players in Felixstowe area. 16+. Wide variety of games played. Call Paul 01394 276975

● Wanted: players (18+) for weekly game in Southend on Sea area. Mark on 0171 3682213 daytime

● *Warhammer 40k* player in Cambridge area seeks other players over 16. Call Tom 01638 780745 after 5pm

● *Warhammer 40k* player seeks fellow gamers in West Yorkshire area (14+) Phone Chris 01943 602852

● *Warhammer 40k/AD&D* player seeks to start a game club in Smethwick. Phone Mark 0121 5558290

● *Warhammer 40k/Quest* player seeks players 16–19. Bridgewater area. Please contact Paul, 45 Friarn Ave, Bridgewater, Somerset TA6 3RF

fanzines

● *Entity,* the skiffy fanzine. Fiction, PBM. Send 40p and SSAE to Entity, Old Barn, Hundley Way, Charlbury OX7 3QE

● New fanzine: *RAGE!* It covers RPGs, PBMs, CCGs, sci-fi & lots of other stuff. Tel 01291 421105 Peter

● *Role Call* – A4 fanzine for console RPGs (*FFIII* etc.). Four issues available £1.20 or £7 sub (six issues). Rachel Ryan 01925 490910

● Writers and artists wanted for new SF/fantasy magazine. SAE to 39, Stoneyfield Road, Old Coulsdon, Surrey CR5 2HP, UK

messages

● Cyrus Fellbane – all is forgiven. Meet me in the Ruins of Rakfell to discuss this matter further. Contact Eyelon Silverbirch

other stuff

● Clan Amber – a residential *Amber* RPG convention in Edinburgh. 8–10 Nov. Contact Nicky Cannon 70/5 Craighouse Gardens, Edinburgh EH10 5UN

● Dudley Bug Ball (27.4.96) presented by the Black Country RPS, a Midlands RPG convention in aid of charity. £1. Details: Steve Turner 01384 235244

● UK gamers list. Send SAE with details to Ross, 369 Broomhead Drive, Dunfermline KY12 9AG

● *Vampire Masquerade* LRP party. Tickets £6 (book early for £1 off). Date: April 28th. Phone 0151 3439363. £10 for dinner, breakfast and crash

● *Warhammer Quest* rules supplement being compiled. Contributors needed. Write to Cerith, 42 St Francis Way, Grays, Essex RM16 4PB

● Write to Trevannion House, Cardrew Lane, Redruth, Cornwall for free RPG by mail! Leave address. Ten players needed

Please place my free ad under the following heading

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- We cannot vouch for the quality of goods and services offered in this section

May 1996

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SEND TO: arcane READER ADS, 30 MONMOUTH STREET, BEAUFORD COURT, BATH BA1 2BW

IT WAS A TIME OF DARKNESS

by TB Falsename Episode Two

PREVIOUSLY ON "IT WAS A TIME OF DARKNESS":

Confounding the hopelessly complicated plans of the wizard Dixdastardlax, Princess Breasts and Ash are about to learn from Inspector Petit-Pivic what new dangers face Akansaxchukabuk when they are attacked by unseen archers.

Meanwhile, unseen archers interrupt Inspector Petit-Pivic's explanation to Princess Breasts and Ash of the new dangers facing Akansaxchukabuk, cheapening their confoundment of the wizard Dixdastardlax's hopelessly complicated plans.

Now read on.

(Scene: The river. Arrows splatter into the party's rowing boat as they huddle feebly.)

ASH: Get behind me – I'm a tree.

PRINCESS: No you're not.

PETIT-PIVIC: Quick – capsize the boat. We'll use the hull as a shell and paddle to safety while our slower-witted foes continue firing blindly, thinking we're sitting here bumbling over what to – aaarghh! *(Dies.)*

ASH: Dammit – killed before she could complete her escape plan.

PRINCESS: We'll have to swim for it.

ASH *(peering into the gloom)*: There's no point. We're surrounded by the entire army of Akansaxchukabuk's evil neighbour Grimsaxhaibailak fully equipped for an invasion. *(Fatalistically.)* Looks like we'll never know what dangers face the old home town. Aaarghh! *(Dies. Falls on oar, which levers to crack Princess Breasts under the chin. Cut to black.)*

(Fade in on Princess tied to chair. She snaps awake. Pull back to show she's in a tent – the field headquarters of the Grimsaxhaibailak army.)

PRINCESS *(furiously)*: What is the meaning of this? *(Beat.)* Wait a minute…

GENERAL REDMAX: Yes, Princess. Not so cocksure without your powers of interrogative perplexity, eh? Defogging your pronouns was a simple matter for a master of maajikcke such as I.

PRINCESS *(gesturing to take in the tent and the army outside, except she can't, but still)*: Your invasion of Akansaxchukabuk will not succeed.

REDMAX: How in – ? No matter. You forget, Princess, that your city is in political turmoil. The king is lost, that wizard and his lapdog plot to betray one another, and with you as my prisoner your people will have to open the gates.

PRINCESS *(sniffs)*: You don't know my people at all.

REDMAX: On the contrary. *(He indicates a representative sample filling in questionnaires.)* I've been planning this for months. Nothing's been left to chance. What the devil?

(Ash and Inspector Petit-Pivic have burst in, brandishing weapons.)

ASH *(signalling the officers should stand as if posed figures)*: Frieze!

PETIT-PIVIC: Nobody move, and I guarantee you won't be hurt.

AN OFFICER: What, ever?

ANOTHER OFFICER: Does that also apply to behavioural aberrations?

PRINCESS: Petit-Pivic! Ash! *(She embraces them joyfully, except she doesn't.)* But – I saw you die.

PETIT-PIVIC: No you didn't. The arrow merely grazed my temple.

ASH: And it turns out I am a tree.

REDMAX: How did you get past my entire army?

PETIT-PIVIC: We removed our shoes.

REDMAX: Curses. *(Feinting, then hurling a phial.)* Feel the might of my çauçyry.

(Colourful explosion. Expensive sequence of Ash, Petit-Pivic and Princess spinning through dimensions. Cut to featureless plain. Party rises into shot.)

ASH: What a wierd place.

PRINCESS *(slowly)*: Oh no…

PETIT-PIVIC *(sharply)*: What are you inferring?

PRINCESS *(desperately)*: It's the Realm of Illiteracy.

ASH: Slack grammar.

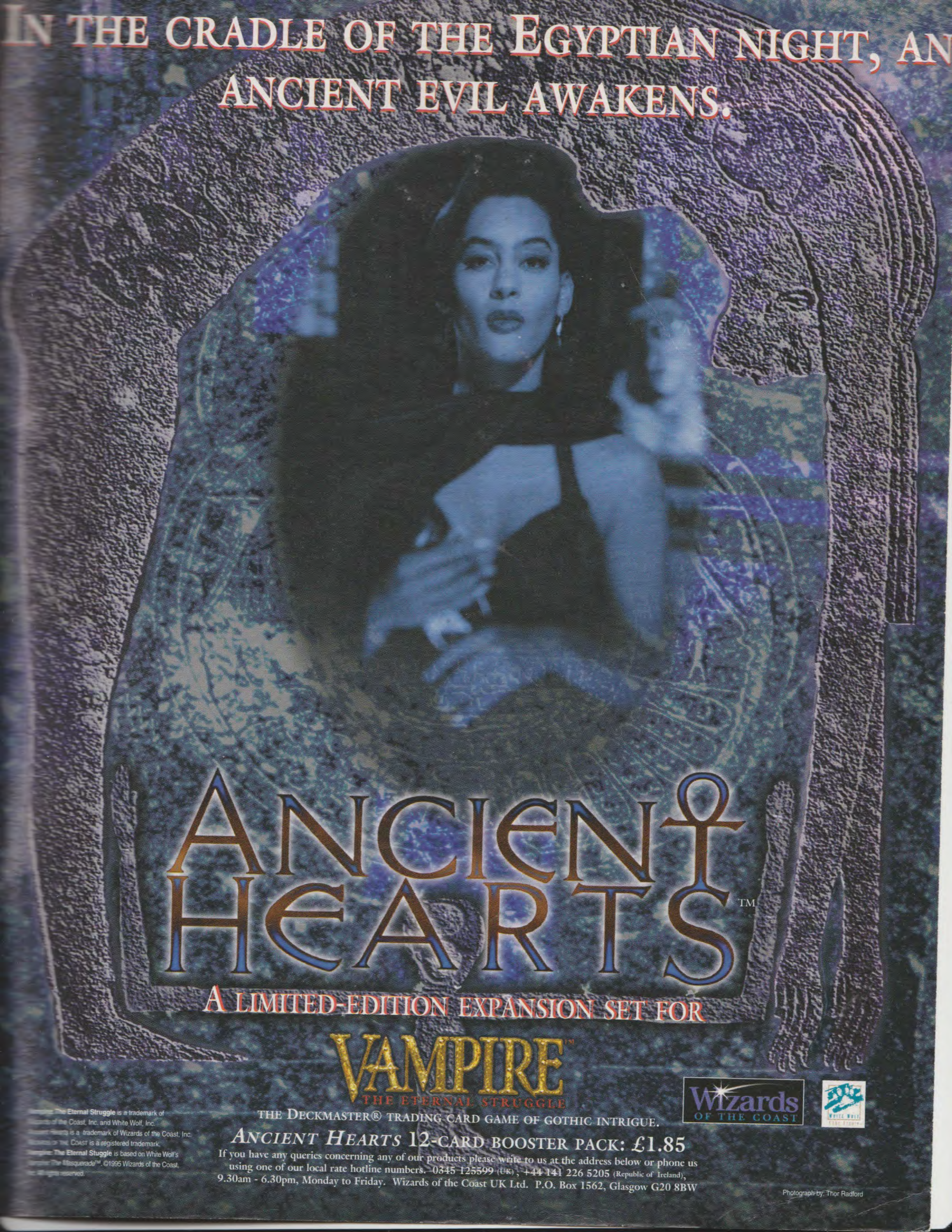
PRINCESS: Whatever. *(As a mantra.)* Practise – practice – minuscule – separate…

ASH *(dully)*: We must sieze the future.

PETIT-PIVIC *(blankly)*: We should of killed him.

PRINCESS: … vying – disperate – oh no! Aaarghh!

TO BE CONTINEUD…



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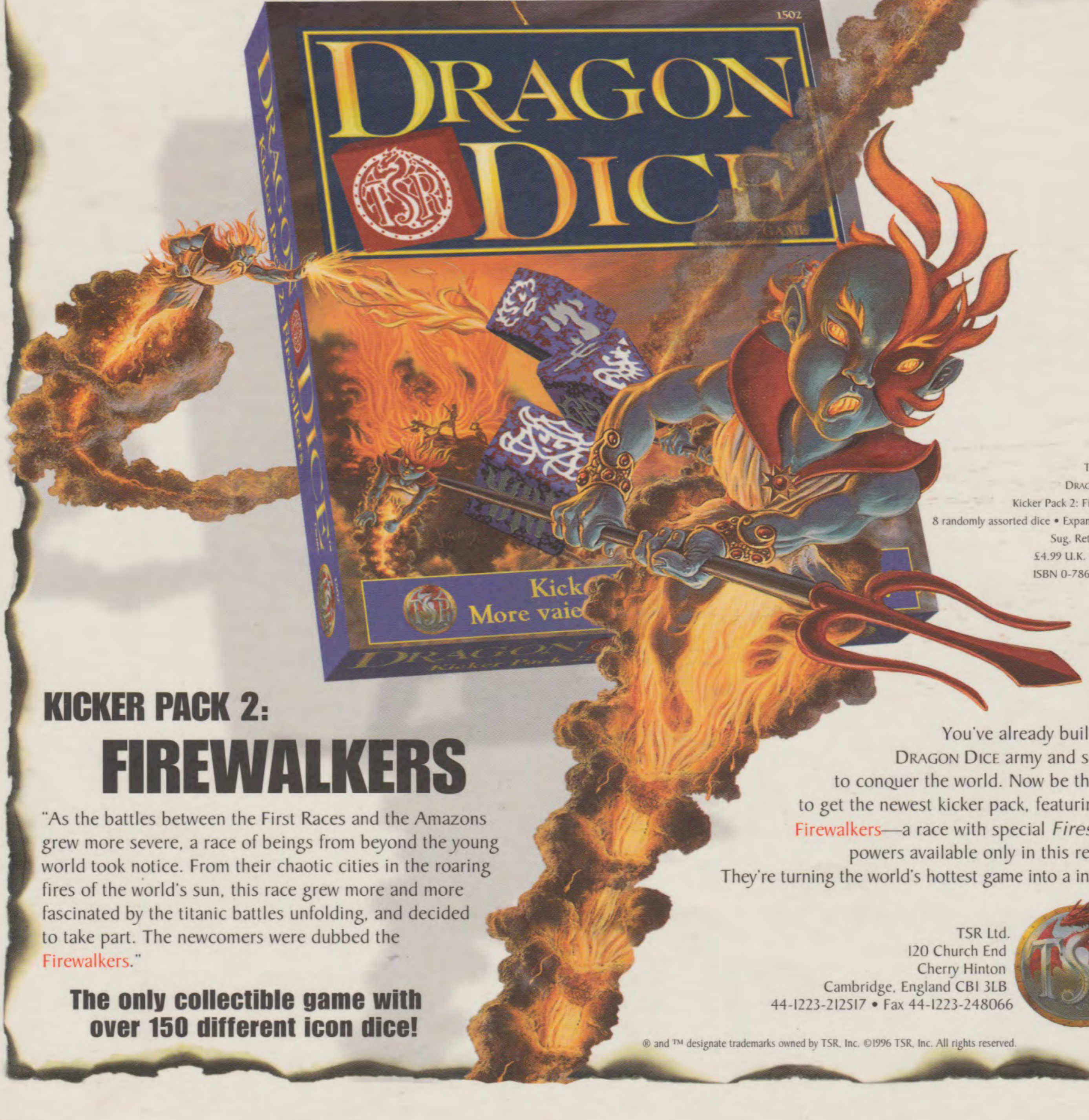
READY . . . AIM . . . FIRE



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